The Invasion That Never Was



Michel Danino / Sujata Nahar

THE INVASION THAT NEVER WAS

SONG OF HUMANITY

"A time must come when the Indian mind will shake off the darkness that has fallen upon it, cease to think or hold opinions at second and third hand and reassert its right to judge and enquire in a perfect freedom into the meaning of its own Scriptures."

Sri Aurobindo
(c. 1911)



Statue of a "priest" or yogi
(Mohenjo-daro, c. 2500 BC)

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Part One

The Invasion That Never Was

EVERY Indian child who goes to school soon meets with that special moment when he is told about his early ancestors, their origin, their story, their achievements. A window suddenly opens, his small horizon strains to encompass those faraway and mysterious times. Being Indian seems to acquire a greater meaning—though one that will long remain as misty as what he is being taught.

And what is he taught? If anything at all, it will be that some 1500 years before the Christian era, hordes of semi-barbarian, Sanskrit-speaking pastoral nomads, the "Aryans," poured from Central Asia or thereabouts into North-West India, where they came upon the highly developed Indus Valley or Harappan civilization, which had been flourishing there for over a millennium and whose inhabitants were Dravidians. The invading "Aryans" destroyed this civilization and pushed the Dravidians south,

then over a few centuries composed the Vedas, got Sanskrit to spread all over India, and built the mighty Ganges civilization. That, in a nutshell, is what most educated Indians know of their distant past, and is still today presented as solid knowledge, something no one need or should argue about. It is there not only in textbooks, but in "authoritative" reference books and in the best dictionaries.

The Sun's revolving around the Earth, too, was for centuries such a dead certainty to early European astronomers that Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler had to be dangerous heretics to think otherwise—luckily, that certainty is now dead indeed, as are the countless instances of human blindness that litter the ages. The "Aryan Invasion Theory," as it is called, is another such instance. As established and apparently indisputable as it may have become through decades of thoughtless repetition, it does not rest on a single solid piece of evidence. In fact, it has by now been thoroughly disproved by all the evidence brought to light by archaeology, astronomy, ancient geography and mathematics. Nevertheless, those in India who today dispute it are still eyed with considerable suspicion, as if they had committed some awful crime, and we can expect this venerated if crumbling pillar of ancient history

to figure in our Indian textbooks for some more time, during which the roots of India's civilization and culture will continue to be somewhere in Central Asia, just as the Sun kept revolving around the Earth for a few centuries after Copernicus, and species remained forbidden to evolve for decades after Darwin.

But how did this theory come to be so widely accepted if it was wholly groundless? Extensive studies have been devoted to the factors that contributed to its genesis and spectacular growth; we will only give here a brief overview.

I. The Birth of a Myth

"Inconvenient Guests"

When, in the eighteenth century, a few European thinkers began to try and fathom India's philosophy and religion, they were so struck by the depth, the ancientness, the richness they saw, that they soon declared India to have been the "cradle of the human race" and the "birthplace of civilization" in the words of Dohm, a German scholar, and the Hindus to be "the gentlest of people." The great Voltaire lent his name to this view: "We have shown how much we surpass the Indians in courage and wickedness, and how inferior to them we are in wisdom. Our European nations have mutually destroyed themselves in this land where we only go in search of money, while the first Greeks travelled to the same land only to instruct themselves."[1] He concluded, "I am convinced that everything has come down to us from the banks of the Ganges,

astronomy, astrology, metempsychosis, etc."[2] Many of the early travellers to India of the time (the exceptions being found mostly among the missionaries) tended to share this enthusiasm. "All history points to India as the mother of science and art," William Macintosh wrote. "This country was anciently so renowned for knowledge and wisdom that the philosophers of Greece did not disdain to travel thither for their improvement." Pierre Sonnerat, a French naturalist, concurred: "We find among the Indians the vestiges of the most remote antiquity.... We know that all peoples came there to draw the elements of their knowledge.... India, in her splendour, gave religions and laws to all the other peoples; Egypt and Greece owed to her both their fables and their wisdom."[3]

This generous estimate started changing as Britain's hold over India grew more firm and widespread, especially after the victories over Tipu Sultan and the Marathas at the turn of the nineteenth century. The supremacy of the British over most of India was left with little challenge, and they could now embark in right earnest on their set task: the draining of India's fabulous wealth. While most eighteenth-century European travellers to India described her as "flourishing," less than a

century later she had sunk into depths of dismal misery. One British historian noted in 1901: "Time was, not more distant than a century and a half ago, when Bengal was much more wealthy than was Britain."[4] Another even asserted that Britain's Industrial Revolution could not have taken off without the influx of money that followed the conquest of Bengal: "Very soon after Plassey [in 1757], the Bengal plunder began to arrive in London, and the effect appears to have been instantaneous, for all the authorities agree that the 'industrial revolution' ... began with the year 1760.... Possibly since the world began no investment has ever yielded the profit reaped from the Indian plunder."[4]

In 1778, Anquetil-Duperron, a French Orientalist who spent some seven years in India, had recorded this moving testimony:

> "Peaceful Indians, ... did the rumour of your riches have to penetrate a clime in which artificial needs know no bounds? Soon, new foreigners reached your shores; inconvenient guests, everything they touched belonged to them...; it was not enough that they should invade your commerce, make the price of foodstuffs and goods triple, alter their quality; your factories almost wiped out, the workers taking refuge in the mountains, a dying son asking his

father what harm he did those foreigners who have taken the bread out of his mouth—nothing touches or softens their hearts: 'Your gold,' the Peruvians and Mexicans were told; here, the revenue of Industan is what we demand, even if for that streams of blood have to flow. At least, unfortunate Indians, you will perhaps learn that in the space of two hundred years, one European who saw you and lived among you, has dared to plead your cause and present to the Court of the Universe your wounded rights, those of mankind blackened by a vile interest.[5]

"If the British ... neglect any longer to enrich Europe's scholars with the Sanskrit scriptures ..., they will bear the shame of having sacrificed honour, probity, and humanity to the vile love for gold and money, without human knowledge having derived the least lustre, the least growth from their conquests."[6]

Voltaire, too, had painted the motives for Europe's interest in India in stark language:

"No sooner did India begin to be known to the Occident's barbarians than she was the object of their greed, and even more so when these barbarians became civilized and industrious, and created new needs for themselves.... The Albuquerques and

their successors succeeded in supplying Europe with pepper and paintings only through carnage."[7]

But unlike the Portuguese, the British were anxious to clothe their greed in lofty ideals: the "white man's burden" of civilizing (and, naturally, Christianizing) less enlightened races, the "divinely ordained mission" of bringing to India the glory of Europe's commercial and industrial civilization, and so forth. Articles, pamphlets, speeches, thick volumes began pouring forth by the hundred year after year in praise of the "tremendous task of rescuing India" from the darkness into which she had fallen. Understandably, the recognition of India's far more ancient and refined civilization made such noble motives untenable. Thus began a systematic campaign to disparage not only this civilization, its culture and society, but the very roots of Hinduism.

Scholarly Trickery

To this end, the knowledge of Sanskrit, which a few scholars had only recently succeeded in mastering after coaxing the Brahmins for decades into

instructing them in this mysterious language, was seen as a boon. From the end of the eighteenth century, English translations of the Hindu scriptures had begun to appear; but the initial admiration they generated among the translators turned to overweening scorn in the nineteenth century. Sadly, but mistakenly, the majority of Europe's Sanskrit scholars were now certain that these translations would "carry their own condemnation,"[8] in the words of one of them. Even the celebrated Max Müller (whose research work, interestingly, was commissioned and generously paid for by the East India Company after he had been engaged by Macaulay), wrote to his wife: "This edition of mine and the translation of the Veda, will hereafter tell to a great extent on the fate of India and on the growth of millions of souls in that country. It is the root of their religion and to show them what the root is, I feel sure, is the only way of uprooting all that has sprung from it during the last three thousand years."[9]

That this plan misfired and eventually led to renewed interest in India is another story, one that is a testimony to the strength of her culture. In the meantime, most Sanskritists vied with each other in running down Indian scriptures, especially the

Veda. "What can be more tedious than the Veda?" asked Max Müller, who found many of its hymns to "yield no sense whatever." "The verses of the Veda appear singularly prosaic," echoed Wilson, "and at any rate their chief value lies not in their fancy [*sic*] but in their facts, social and religious." Monier-Williams found the Vedic hymns "to abound more in puerile ideas than in striking thoughts and lofty conceptions." Griffith was struck by the "intolerable monotony of a great number of the hymns," whose language and style, according to Cowell, "is singularly artificial." This last, however, was so generous as to concede that "far wider and deeper study is needed to pierce to the real meaning of these old hymns."[10] The unanimity was almost complete. Is it surprising, then, that these scholars' translations of the Veda was mostly gibberish—exactly what they said the Veda was? Yet these translations are even today regarded as monuments of scholarship and reverently referred to.

Now, the study of Sanskrit soon revealed an unexpected fact: there were numerous striking similarities between Sanskrit and Greek and Latin, pointing to an ancient link between these languages. While this discovery would have come as no surprise

to the eighteenth-century scholars, their successors could now hardly accept that they owed their languages and civilization to a benighted India —this would have been dealing a blow to the very foundation of Europe's mission in India, and in particular to the British Empire now at the height of its glory. These proud scholars, jumping at "linguistic evidence" which they claimed to find in the Veda, explained that it was just the other way round : the Vedic Dasyus were arbitrarily identified with the Dravidians, and the wars between them and the Aryans became "proof" of the bloody conquest of Northern India by "the great army of Aryan immigrants in their onward march"[10] from Central Asia (or Iran, or even Tibet, in some variants of this sublime myth). These Aryans became therefore "Indo-Europeans," or "Indo-Germans" as we shall see, whose original tongue was the hypothetical reconstruction called Indo-European, still today postulated to be the source of Greek, Latin and Germanic on one side, and Indo-Iranian and Sanskrit on the other. Thus the Rig-Veda was shown as being "rather Indo-European than Hindu, and representing the condition of the Aryans before their final settlement in India,"[10] as one European Sanskritist put it. Which is another

way of saying that Hinduism really came from "Indo-European" regions, wherever they may be.

Never mind that this so-called evidence did not stand a moment's scrutiny, that the Rig-Veda itself made it clear that the wars between Aryans and Dasyus were battles between powers of light and darkness, that the word "Aryan" was plainly used in the Veda to describe not a racial group but a quality of being and a culture, a dedication to the truth and readiness to fight for it—all this was simply brushed aside, and a whole edifice was promptly erected on these non-existent foundations.

Nor was that all. The Aryan invasion theory—now almost a proved "fact"—was soon put to new perverted uses, as the British became aware of the benefit they could derive from it to buttress their rule. It was found effective not only in cutting down the Indian's pride in his past and nation, but also in sharpening the divisions of Hindu society and exacerbating caste conflicts so as to give fresh legitimacy and intensity to the efforts at conversion that had been going on for several centuries. For instance, since the Hindus were shown to be themselves former invaders of the same family as the Europeans', that made it easier to legitimize Britain's rule in India as merely one more "Aryan wave"

which, this time, would bring India the true light: "What has taken place since the commencement of the British rule in India is only a reunion, to a certain extent, of the members of the same family," John Wilson, a missionary, declared with a straight face, and naturally this happy reunion had now brought India into contact "with the most enlightened and philanthropic nation in the world."[11] More seriously, scholars and missionaries,* not content with sowing division between supposedly different races, declared the Brahmins to be the "pure descendants of the Aryan invaders," who, soon after their conquest, created the caste system in order to perpetuate their supremacy over the native inhabitants. It followed that the lower castes and the Dravidians, both victims of the Aryan "oppressors," were to be encouraged to rebel and reject every "Aryan import," beginning of course with Hinduism. Christianity, shown as being more "egalitarian," was projected as the natural "liberating" force for these sections of Indian society, among which mass conversions did take place as a result. A special effort was made for the conversion of India's

* Both clearly the two sides of the same coin: "[In missionaries] scholarship is warmed with the holy flame of Christian zeal,"[11] wrote W. W. Hunter.

aboriginal tribes: "They have yet to start on the path of progress," wrote Hunter. "It remains for us to decide whether that path is to lead them to Hinduism, or to the purer faith and civilization which we represent."[11] A few decades later, Islam too started using the same arguments, with the help of some Indian intellectuals who loved to look down on Hindu society without ever attempting to understand its true roots and what had given it the strength to live through centuries of onslaught and decay. It is not for nothing that India is still today home to the only ancient culture to have survived the combined waves of Christianity and Islam—all others have disappeared under the sands of Time.

Divide and Convert

This was, with rare exceptions, the deeply inimical attitude prevalent through the nineteenth century, especially in Britain. Rulers, scholars, civil servants and missionaries shared it in generous measure. Thomas B. Macaulay, the first Law Member of the Governor-General's Legislature, wrote in his notorious 1835 Minute that Hinduism was

based on "a literature admitted to be of small intrinsic value ... [one] that inculcates the most serious errors on the most important subjects ... hardly reconcilable with reason, with morality ... fruitful of monstrous superstitions." Hindus had therefore been fed for millennia with a "false history, false astronomy, false medicine ... in company with a false religion."[12] About the same time, Alexander Duff, a prominent missionary, wrote, "Of all the systems of false religion ever fabricated by the perverse ingenuity of fallen man, Hinduism is surely the most stupendous."[13] Charles Trevelyan, an officer with the East India Company asserted in a widely circulated tract: "The multitudes who flock to our schools ... cannot return under the dominion of the Brahmins. The spell has been for ever broken. Hinduism is not a religion that will bear examination.... It gives way at once before the light of European science."[14] Richard Temple, another high officer, said in a 1883 speech to a London missionary society intended to generate donations to missions: "India presents the greatest of all fields for missionary exertion.... India is a country which of all others we are bound to enlighten with eternal truth.... But what is most important to you friends of missions, is this—that there is a large

population of aborigines, a people who are outside caste. . . . If they are attached, as they rapidly may be, to Christianity, they will form a nucleus round which British power and influence may gather. Remember, too, that Hinduism, although it is dying, yet has force ... and such tribes, if not converted to Christianity, may be perverted to Hinduism. . . . You may be confident that the missions in India are doing a work which strengthens the imperial foundations of British power. . . . I say that, of all the departments I have ever administered, I never saw one more efficient than the missionary department."[15] We meet Temple again a few years later addressing more missions in New York in the most explicit terms: "Thus India is like a mighty bastion which is being battered by heavy artillery. We have given blow after blow, and thud after thud, and the effect is not at first very remarkable; but at last with a crash the mighty structure will come toppling down, and it is our hope that some day the heathen religions of India will in like manner succumb."[16] Fond hope indeed.

This is not the place to dwell on the tragic consequences of such tactics (even less on the hypocrisy of Britain's civil servants in India, who professed not to meddle in religious matters); we

can only stress that the convert now found himself cut off from his ancient roots, attached to a foreign godhead and a foreign culture, and taught to despise and revile everything that for millennia had been an object of worship for his ancestors—including his own country. We should also point out that, then as now, the clinching factor in most conversions was the use of all kinds of inducements, monetary and other, often taking advantage of a great poverty. And we can lastly observe that the same tactic of denigrating India's ancient heritage in order to create divisions in her society continues today with full vigour—only with a little more subtlety.[17]*

The "invasionist" syndrome thus used depths upon depths of tangled deceit and deliberate distortion,

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* It is also not the place to show the vaunted "just and merciful rule" of the British for the barbaric tyranny it was. The burning of ancient books on Ayurveda in Kerala so as to impose the European system of medicine on the natives, the cutting of weavers' thumbs in Bengal with a view to crippling the production of superior Indian cloth and ensuring the sale of British products, the ruthless, often bloody, extortion of revenue from the peasants for decades on end, even in the midst of the worst famines, the whippings, hangings and tortures that awaited those who opposed the Empire—these are only a few among the unending examples of the "providential character" of the British rule. But they took place too far from the "civilized" world to attract any notice. The Britons liked the relief of high-sounding speeches in London's salons, adorned with a few pagan objets d'art purloined from India.

with the chief aim of convincing Indians that this new "invasion" of British Aryans was meant to finally save them from the aberrations that stemmed from the first invasion!

Unfortunately, many of the wounds the Aryan invasion theory inflicted on Indian society are still painfully open today, nurtured as they have been by missionaries, Marxist historians and politicians, who together have made sure that divisions between castes have been sharpening rather than subsiding —for the simple reason that without such divisions they would all be out of business. A typical example of this short-sighted strategy is the use of the word *adivasi* (i.e., original inhabitant) to depict the Harijans and the tribals, thus trying to put a stamp of evidence on the "colonization" of India by the higher castes: if the former are Adivasis, what are the latter?[18] Yet, as we will see, the so-called Adivasis are no more "adi" than Brahmins or any other higher castes.

Another instance can be found in South Indian politics, where an all-too-frequently heard refrain has been, with varying shades of intensity, that the Dravidians came to India long before the "Aryan invaders," and that the latter's descendants, the Brahmins and most North Indians, have tried to "impose their culture on the non-Aryans" and should

therefore be resisted. Not only has the teaching and study of Sanskrit been discouraged, but there even was an attempt (mostly in the 1940s and 1950s) to "cleanse" the Tamil language of all its Sanskrit words!* Although to be fair, the seed in this case was, once again, planted by nineteenth-century scholars-cum-missionaries, notably Bishop Caldwell, who insisted that the so-called Dravidian languages formed a family wholly unconnected with the family of "Indo-Aryan" languages. As a result, all Tamil grammar books prepared by or for Christian missionaries—since knowing the language of potential converts is indispensable—never miss an opportunity to assert that while Tamil is a South Indian language, Sanskrit is a "North Indian language." Divide and rule, but also divide and convert.

The following recent observation of a noted South Indian writer and academic in a history book is a painful index of how deep these divisive doctrines have penetrated: "Again and again Tamil has had, during its long history, to stand the impact of alien influences and cultures. *Sanskrit*, Persian

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* Even of five letters needed to write and pronounce these Sanskrit words with some precision: the five so-called "Grantha" letters, regarded as "Northern letters." But if they are "Northern," then so is the entire Tamil alphabet, since, like the Grantha letters, it derives from the Brahmi script.

and Urdu, French and English, *Buddhism, Jainism,* Islam and Christianity—these in successive or concurrent waves have threatened to overrun the Tamil language or destroy the character of Tamil culture. But Tamil has always managed to assimilate the *foreign* matter...."[19]* As we will see, however, South Indian languages are deeply related to Sanskrit, and no such North-South or Aryan-Dravidian division exists in reality.

In large parts of India, frictions, riots and loss of life have been the inevitable reaping of such sowing. It is indeed a wonder that in the face of such relentless battering the Indian society has not by now completely disintegrated—as would have any other not endowed with the deep cultural unity that India had fostered over millennia. But after two centuries, the strain is beginning to tell.

The Aryan Invasion of Europe

What is not so well known in India is that our footloose Aryans, not content with overrunning

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* All emphasis ours. Sanskrit, Buddhism or Jainism are *foreign* to Tamil culture! We may contrast this astonishing statement with Swami Vivekananda: "The South had been the repository of Vedic learning." We will come back to this point.

the Indian subcontinent, invaded Europe too! And thereby hangs an instructive tale. For Christian Europe, long uncomfortable with what it thought to be a Hebrew ancestry, was eager to find for itself an identity distinct from the Jewish;[20] the sudden appearance of the Aryan race out of the misty plateaus of Central Asia was seen as a godsend, especially in the strongly anti-Semitic atmosphere of the nineteenth century. Thus was born one more myth, this time of the Aryan European, Christian of course, and preferably Germanic. It had the added advantage of confirming the "natural" supremacy of the white race. As a Swiss linguist wrote in 1859 with some élan: "Before history began, a whole race was destined by Providence to reign one day supreme over the entire earth.... They were the race of the Aryas, endowed from the beginning with the very qualities which the Hebrews lacked.... The former was destined to absorb the other. The religion of Christ became the torch of humanity. The genius of Greece adopted it. The power of Rome propagated it. Germanic energy gave it new strength. The whole race of the European Aryas ... came to be the main instrument of God's plan for the destiny of mankind."[21]

That there was not a shred of evidence in support

of this bloated rhetoric was not going to deter these daydreaming scholars. The "European Arya" soon became the "Indo-German," and the growth of the Aryan invasion theory became intimately linked with that of nineteenth-century theories of racial supremacy, especially of a Teutonic or Nordic sort. Dissenting voices, which pointed out that the Aryan doctrine was "a figment of the professional imagination," were drowned in the enthusiasm generated by the delirious rise of German nationalism. Ernest Renan, the French historian of religion, wrote in 1860, "The Semites are incapable of doing that which is essential. Let us remain Germans and Celts; let us keep our 'eternal gospel,' Christianity.... [After] the Semitic race declined, the Aryan race alone was left to lead the march of human destiny."[22] Linguists vied with anthropologists, and historians with craniologists, in depicting the features of the Indo-Germans: they were of course "a noble race of fair-haired, blue-eyed people," asserted Posche, a German author, and whole treatises were devoted to the Aryans' cranial features, "nasal index" and other such will-o'-the-wisps.

It is not widely known that this racial element contributed in no small measure to the spread of the theory of an Aryan invasion of India. "Max

Müller [in his lectures in London] repeatedly hammered away at the idea that the terms Indo-European and Indo-Germanic must be replaced by Aryan," writes the American historian Synder, "because the people who invaded India and who spoke Sanskrit called themselves Arya. This primitive Aryan language indicated that there was an *Aryan race*, the common ancestor of Germans, Celts, Romans, Slavs, Greeks, Persians, and Hindus." Yet, stresses Synder, "all attempts to correlate the Aryan language with the Aryan race are not only unsuccessful, but absurd."[23]

Years later, when Germany was reunified following its victory over France in 1870-71 and began ominously growing in power, people like Max Müller and Renan did make a brave attempt to reject this racial aspect of the Aryan theory to which they had earlier lent their full support. They now argued that the word "Arya" only referred to a linguistic group, not to a race. But it was too late: the harm had been done. The heady vision of these glorious ancestors endowed with "nobility of blood and gift of intelligence"[21] continued to gain momentum. Year after year, raging debates went on across borders to determine which European people was the true descendant of the Aryan "master-race,"

and therefore which nation could claim a divine right to dominate others. Europe witnessed "the ridiculous and humiliating spectacle of eminent scholars subordinating their interest in truth to the inflation of racial and national pride."[24] The most vociferous were undoubtedly the pro-Germanic. Pseudo-scholars like the Count de Gobineau (a noble Frenchman later revered by the Nazis as one of their prophets), non-scholars like the composer Wagner, all and sundry added their voice to the swelling wave. "After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, Aryanism became a nationalist dogma in the newly unified German state."[25] In fact it came to be doubted that the Aryans' "original homeland" was at all Central Asia, and several scholars sought to prove on "scientific grounds" that it really was Germany (Central and Western Germany, to be precise!). When in 1924 Hitler wrote in his *Mein Kampf*, "The Aryan alone can be considered as the founder of culture ... a conqueror who subjugated inferior races," he was merely echoing and amplifying dozens of nineteenth-century savants who had written as many thick tomes to buttress their fantasy. A few years later, full-blown Nazism was no more than a monstrous—but in a way perfectly logical—application of their race theories, with the

consequences we know. With the Second World War, all these scholarly castles in the air collapsed with a thud, and no one dared speak of an Aryan race any more: "The belief in an Aryan 'race' had become accepted by philologists who knew nothing of science.... What these men have written on the subject has been cast by historians into the limbo of discarded and discredited theories,"[25] wrote the British biologist Julian Huxley. "*Aryan* has no validity as an ethnological term," says the Webster dictionary (1980).

This was the end of the Aryan Myth—but only as far as Europe was concerned. For the Aryan invasion theory was still good enough for India: the same Webster declares in the same breath that the word Aryan was "used [in India] as tribal name to distinguish from indigenous races"! This is like saying that, all right, the Earth now revolves round the Sun, but the planets are *still* revolving round the Earth. The ways of the human mind are unfathomable. But the reason for this apparent paradox is simple: in India the mainspring of the Aryan invasion theory—the aim of perpetuating the domination of the Western view of the world over the Indian—remains very much alive today.

II. Indian Protests

Let us go back to the nineteenth century, when the Aryan invasion theory began to be trumpeted, and see what the reactions were in India. At first it met with no opposition: the Indian mind had become largely subservient to the West (is it much better today?), and would rather listen to Europe's worthy scholars than to India's own savants and seers.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati was perhaps the first to dispute the Aryan myth, emphasizing that the word *ārya* referred in the Veda to a moral or inner quality, not to any race or people. In fact it was the whole European view of the Veda that he rejected: "He seized justly on the Veda as India's Rock of Ages," wrote Sri Aurobindo. "In the matter of Vedic interpretation I am convinced that whatever may be the final complete interpretation, Dayananda will be honoured as the first discoverer of the right clues."[1] By the same token, Dayananda

forcefully opposed the Christian missionaries' vilification of India's ancient culture, and engaged in public debates with some of them (with maulanas too), especially in Punjab where a wave of conversions had taken place. "His performance in public debates not only stopped further conversions," writes the historian Sita Ram Goel, "but also gave birth to a new movement—*shuddhi* (purification) of those who had been enticed away from Hindu society.... It sent a wave of consternation through the missionary circles and restored Hindu confidence. In days to come, the missionaries became more and more reluctant to meet Dayananda in open forums."[2]

Swami Vivekananda

But it was really Swami Vivekananda who turned the tide, and with his phenomenal force hammered into his fellow Indians the need to feel proud of their great heritage. With his deep knowledge not only of Hindu scriptures but of Western history and religions, he was quick to see through the gaps in the Aryan edifice. In a lecture in the USA, he remarked scornfully: "And what your European

Pandits say about the Aryans swooping down from some foreign land snatching away the land of aborigines and settling in India by exterminating them, is all pure nonsense, foolish talk. Strange that our Indian scholars too say 'Amen' to them." He added sadly, "And all these monstrous lies are being taught to our boys."[3] They still are, a hundred years later. In another lecture, this time in India, he was in a more humorous mood, but mercilessly to the point:

> "Our [European] archaeologist dreams of India being full of dark-eyed aborigines, and the bright Aryans came from—the Lord knows where. According to some, they came from Central Tibet, others will have it that they came from Central Asia. There are patriotic Englishmen who think that the Aryans were all red-haired.... If the writer happens to be a black-haired man, the Aryans were all black-haired. Of late, there was an attempt made to prove that the Aryans lived on the Swiss lakes. I should not be sorry if they had been all drowned there, theory and all. Some say now that they lived at the North Pole. Lord bless the Aryans and their habitations! As for the truth of these theories, there is not one word in our scriptures, not one, to prove that the Aryan ever came from anywhere

> outside India, and in ancient India was included Afghanistan. There it ends. And the theory that the Shudra [i.e., lowest] caste were all non-Aryans ... is equally illogical and equally irrational.... The whole of India is Aryan, nothing else.
>
> "... And the more you go on fighting and quarrelling about all trivialities such as 'Dravidian' and 'Aryan,' and the question of Brahmins and non-Brahmins and all that, the further you are from that accumulation of energy and power which is going to make the future India."[4]

Swami Vivekananda was also acutely aware of the pernicious work of the missionaries in India as in the West; he himself had to suffer a great deal from their calumnies during his stay in America, where he called up a living image of India's spirituality and stirred much genuine interest which was hardly to the liking of the missions. In an 1894 letter from America to his "friends, fellow countrymen and co-religionists of Madras," in which he listed sinister instances of anti-Hindu propaganda which he had seen in America, he wrote, "What have the Hindus done to these disciples of Christ that every Christian child is taught to call the Hindus 'vile' and 'wretches,' and the most horrible devils on earth? Part of the Sunday School

education for children here consists in teaching them to hate everybody who is not a Christian, and the Hindus especially, so that, from their very childhood, they may subscribe their pennies to the missions.... Look again at the books published in Madras against the Hindu religion. If a Hindu writes one such line against the Christian religion, the missionaries will cry fire and vengeance."[5]

But Swami Vivekananda's one concern was to awaken his countrymen to their own riches:

> "Europe is restless, does not know where to turn.... The wealth and power of a country are in the hands of a few men who ... can deluge the whole earth with blood. Religion and all things are under their feet.... The Western world is governed by a handful of Shylocks.[6]
>
> "India can never be Europe until she dies.... Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct; and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as the male and female deities, with money as its priest, fraud, force, and competition its ceremonies, and the human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be.... India will be raised, not with the power of

the flesh, but with the power of the spirit.... Say not that you are weak. The spirit is omnipotent.... Call up the divinity within you."[7]

Sri Aurobindo

A systematic refutation of the Aryan invasion theory had to wait until Sri Aurobindo. In 1910, after he had worked for a decade to awaken the spirit of independence in India, and spent a year in prison, he learned that the British had finally decided to deport him under new draconian laws (they regarded him as "the most dangerous man we have to deal with at present"); leaving Bengal, he sought refuge in Pondicherry, then a French possession. There, soon afterwards, he took up his study of the Veda, and was surprised to find in it the corroboration of experiences he had recently had in the pursuit of his intensive sadhana.

While reading the Sanskrit text, he also came to question the European scholars' view of the Veda which, "like the majority of educated Indians," he had so far "passively accepted without examination."[8] He soon realized that "If the modern interpretation stands, the Vedas are no doubt of high

interest and value to the philologist, the anthropologist and the historian; but poetically and spiritually they are null and worthless. Its reputation for spiritual knowledge and deep religious wealth, is the most imposing and baseless hoax that has ever been worked upon the imagination of a whole people throughout many millenniums. Is this, then, the last word about the Veda? Or is it not rather the culmination of a long increasing and ever progressing error?"[9]

With his usual keenness of vision, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

> "In India we have fallen during the last few centuries into a fixed habit of unquestioning deference to authority.... We are ready to accept all European theories, the theory of an 'Aryan' colonisation of a Dravidian India, the theory of Nature-worship and henotheism of the Vedic Rishis ... as if these hazardous speculations were on a par in authority and certainty with the law of gravitation and the theory of evolution.[10]
>
> "So great is the force of attractive generalisations and widely popularised errors that all the world goes on perpetuating the blunder talking of the Indo-European races, claiming or disclaiming Aryan kinship and building on that basis of falsehood

> the most far-reaching political, social or pseudo-scientific conclusions."[11]

How prophetic, if we consider that this was written some twenty years before the growth of Nazism with its claims to "Aryan kinship"! In his *Secret of the Veda*, which started appearing from 1914, Sri Aurobindo therefore called on his fellow countrymen not to be "haunted by the unfortunate misconstruction of the Veda which European scholarship has imposed on the modern mind."[12] Taking a straight look at the original text, with no preconception, no *a priori* theory, he observed, "It did not take long to see that the Vedic indications of a racial division between Aryans and Dasyus and the identification of the latter with the indigenous Indians were of a far flimsier character than I had supposed."[13] This division was "a conjecture supported only by other conjectures ... a myth of the philologists."[14] He added, "The indications in the Veda on which this theory of a recent Aryan invasion is built, are very scanty in quantity and uncertain in their significance. There is no actual mention of such an invasion."[15] Above all, he wanted the Indians to develop their own independent judgment:

> "A time must come when the Indian mind will shake off the darkness that has fallen upon it, cease to think or hold opinions at second and third rank and reassert its right to judge and enquire in a perfect freedom into the meaning of its own Scriptures. When that day comes, we shall ... question many established philological myths—the legend, for instance, of an Aryan invasion of India from the north, the artificial and inimical distinction of Aryan and Dravidian which an erroneous philology has driven like a wedge into the unity of the homogeneous Indo-Afghan race...."[16]

Some eighty years later, we know that the "wedge," driven now not only by scholars but also by politicians, has only gone absurdly deeper. Yet Sri Aurobindo's study of Tamil, which he did with the help of Subramania Bharati, led him to discover that the "original connection between the Sanskrit and Tamil tongues" was "far closer and more extensive than is usually supposed" and that they were "two divergent families derived from one lost primitive tongue."[17] The division between Indo-European and Dravidian languages had collapsed: "My first study of Tamil words had brought me to what seemed a clue to the very origins and structure of the ancient Sanskrit tongue."[18]

Sri Aurobindo's study, however, led him to far more momentous results, for he recovered the long lost symbolism of the Veda and brought to light the Rishis' extraordinary experience.*

And, like Swami Vivekananda, he saw the dangers looming ahead:

> "Either India will be rationalised and industrialised out of all recognition and she will be no longer India or else she will be the leader in a new world-phase, aid by her example and cultural infiltration the new tendencies of the West and spiritualise the human race. That is the one radical and poignant question at issue. Will the spiritual motive which India represents prevail on Europe and create there new forms congenial to the West, or will European rationalism and commercialism put an end for ever to the Indian type of culture?"[19]
>
> "The scientific, rationalistic, industrial, pseudo-democratic civilisation of the West is now in process of dissolution and it would be a lunatic absurdity for us at this moment to build blindly on that sinking foundation."[20]

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* See the second part of this book.

The question we should now ask is: Are our latter-day historians, who still swear by Marx or Max Müller, or both, and often have a poor knowledge of Sanskrit and India's traditions, better equipped than a Swami Vivekananda or a Sri Aurobindo, with their depth of understanding and erudition, to tell us what the meaning of the Veda is and the conclusions we are to draw from it?

Yet it is not as if there were no scholars in India to agree with these great seers. We will cite here only two of these striking examples of genuine but ignored Indian scholarship.

Some ten years after the serialization of Sri Aurobindo's *Secret of the Veda*, **R. Swaminatha Aiyar**, a Tamil administrator, linguist and mathematician, carried out extensive research on the so-called Dravidian languages, but not "without previously disposing of a large number of misconceptions and untenable theories about Dravidian languages and Dravidian culture, which have come into existence since the publication of Bishop Caldwell's *Dravidian Grammar*."[21] After a thorough scrutiny of the grammar and roots of these languages, his conclusions confirmed Sri Aurobindo's own findings on the deep connection between Tamil and Sanskrit. Swaminatha Aiyar found most

Dravidian verb forms "of Indo-Aryan origin," and that "the basic portion of Dravidian vocabularies consists of words of Indo-Aryan origin though ... these words have been greatly corrupted and are very difficult of recognition."[21] As N. S. Rajaram, also a mathematician and linguist from South India, remarks in a recent study, "Dravidian languages are strongly inflected like Sanskrit, and cases and declensions are also quite similar.... In some ways these so-called Dravidian languages have preserved ancient forms and usages from Sanskrit better than North Indian languages like Hindi."[22]

B. R. Ambedkar is our second example. Known in India chiefly for his campaign in support of the lowest castes (he himself was a Harijan) and his work on the Indian Constitution, it is often overlooked that in order to find out the truth of the European theories about Aryans and non-Aryans, high and low caste, he did precisely what Sri Aurobindo exhorted Indians to do: he went to the source, and studied the Veda for himself, with an open mind. His conclusions are unequivocal, though regrettably they are largely ignored by those who profess to follow his lead—and who more often than not make a strident use of the very theories he sought to demolish:

"The theory of invasion is an invention. This invention is necessary because of a gratuitous assumption that the Indo-Germanic people are the purest of the modern representatives of the original Aryan race. The theory is based upon nothing but pleasing assumptions, and inferences based on such assumptions. The theory is a perversion of scientific investigation. It is not allowed to evolve out of facts. On the contrary, the theory is preconceived and facts are selected to prove it. It falls to the ground at every point.[23]

"[My conclusions] are:

1. The Vedas do not know any such race as the Aryan race.

2. There is no evidence in the Vedas of any invasion of India by the Aryan race and its having conquered the Dasas and Dasyus supposed to be the natives of India.

3. There is no evidence to show that the distinction between Aryans, Dasas and Dasyus was a racial distinction.

4. The Vedas do not support the contention that the Aryas were different in colour from the Dasas and Dasyus....

"If anthropometry is a science which can be depended upon to determine the race of a people ... [then its] measurements establish that the Brahmins and the Untouchables belong to the same

> race. From this it follows that if the Brahmins are Aryans the Untouchables are also Aryans. If the Brahmins are Dravidians, the Untouchables are also Dravidians...."[24]

Despite these remarkable protests, none listened —we Indians have long had the inexplicable habit of accepting change only if it comes to us from the West. Yet in recent years, some voices have begun to be heard, both in the West and in India, asserting that the time has come to chuck out this worm-eaten theory once and for all. The cumulative evidence from all scientific branches of knowledge, especially archaeology, has become simply too overwhelming to be ignored, except for historians with dubious motives.

III. The Evidence

If we examine the so-called Aryan problem with a fresh, unbiased eye, what strikes us at first is that the Aryan invasion theory and its resulting contrived reconstruction of India's ancient history is in head-on contradiction with Indian tradition. To begin with, neither the Veda nor any other Sanskrit scripture makes any reference to an original homeland outside India; in fact, all descriptions of the "Aryan" land, called variously Saptasindhu, Aryavarta, Bharatvarsha, etc., refer explicitly to the Indian subcontinent and nowhere else. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas too depict a highly developed civilization growing on Indian land and spanning several millennia. It is hard to imagine that the Vedic people, who had such a strong bond with their land and constantly praised its mountains and forests and rivers, would not have carried into

their culture the least memory of their supposed ancestral steppes in Central Asia.

This is all the more strange if we remember that the Epics and Puranas are regarded as based on historical tradition *(itihāsa)*, considerably embellished, to be sure, but still with a kernel of historicity. Of course, this historicity is all rubbish in the eyes of the invasionists (though they may put it more politely), since according to them the civilization those scriptures refer to could only have come into being a few centuries after the invasion, i.e. from about 1000 BC. At best, therefore, the Great War described in the Mahabharata and traditionally dated around 3100 BC, two thousand years earlier, is, in the words of a prominent Indian historian, the glorification of a "local feud"[1] between two Aryan tribes sometime between 1000 and 700 BC; as for the Ramayana, the war between Rama and Ravana may have been originally "a description of local conflicts between the agriculturists of the Ganges Valley and the more primitive hunting and food-gathering societies of the Vindhyan region"![1] One is left wondering whose imagination is the wilder—that of our Epic poets, if they could magnify "local conflicts" into virtual world wars and such primitive societies into

glorious kingdoms and empires full of great heroes, or that of our good historians, who can turn these Epics into such insipid tiffs.

That brings us to the next aberration: we are also asked to believe that in just a few centuries, five at the most, the semiprimitive, cattle-rearing Aryans not only conquered North India, but established there a great civilization and spread all over the subcontinent a unique philosophy and culture founded on Sanskrit and the Veda—quite a stunning development. Anyone with some historical sense knows that ancient civilizations took millennia, not a few centuries, to evolve, mature and spread. In the words of the eminent Indian archaeologist S. P. Gupta, "A civilization is a product of a long process of culture-change and evolution involving long periods of time and large areas of land and not something which happens overnight."[2]

Expectedly, the "modern" view must reject not only the historical value of the Indian tradition, but also any significant spiritual content of the Veda. "The earliest religious ideas of the Aryans," our prominent historian informs us in earnest, "were those of a primitive animism where the forces around them, which they could not control or understand, were invested with divinity and personified as male

or female gods."[1] How far we are from the Rishis' extraordinary conquest of the inner worlds! But they had themselves spelt out the condition on which their hymns could be understood: "Secret words, seer-wisdoms that utter their inner meaning to the seer" (Rig-Veda, IV.3.16). And seers our historians do not try to be.

Aryan-Dravidian Divide or Kinship?

Strangely, both the conquerors and the conquered are guilty of inexplicable amnesia: the South Indian traditions too make no mention of any confrontation with supposed Aryans followed by a migration from the North. Quite the contrary, ancient Tamil tradition traces its origins to a submerged island or continent, Kumari Kandam, situated to the south of India. At the same time, the 2000-year-old Sangam literature shows Chola and Chera kings proudly claiming descent from Rama or from kings of the Lunar dynasty—in other words, an "Aryan" descent. We are told that the greatest Chola king, Karikala, was a patron of both the Vedic religion and Tamil literature, while the Pandya king Nedunjelyan performed many

Vedic sacrifices, and the dynasty of the Pallavas made their capital Kanchi into a great centre of Sanskrit learning and culture. Another Pandya king is said to have fed the armies on both sides during the Bharata war. Only one legend refers to the coming of Dravidian tribes from the North-West, but it does not refer to any conflict and says they first obtained the permission of Krishna—a leader of the "Aryans" if ever there was one. As for Tiruvalluvar, the celebrated author of the Kural, tradition regards him to be an avatar of Brahma. And what about the great Alwar bhaktas and their frequent evocations of the Veda? "Those whose voices are blest, they sang the Vedic songs,"[3] says Andal. Nowhere in all this do we find any trace of Aryan-Dravidian rivalry. Did Shankara or Ramanuja or Madhwa ever claim to represent a "separate Dravidian culture"?

Then we have the Sangam tradition that regards Agastya, the great Vedic Rishi, as the originator of the Tamil language; he is said to have written a Tamil grammar and to have presided over the first two Sangams, and is still today honoured in many temples of Tamil Nadu. The legend of the birth of Tamil is both delightful and rich in meaning.[4] Aeons ago, people from the south flocked to the North, not in a Dravidian invasion, mercifully, but

to attend the wedding of Lord Shiva and Uma on Mount Kailash; such was the multitude that there were fears the earth might tilt over. Appeals were made to Lord Shiva, who, ever compassionate, asked Rishi Agastya to go south: though he was of small stature, his spiritual power was such that his very presence would be enough to restore the earth's balance. Agastya agreed to go with his wife Lopamudra, but asked Lord Shiva to instruct him first in the mysteries of the language of the South. Shiva, placing Agastya to his left and Panini, another Rishi, to his right, seized a drum and started beating it with his two hands. From the sounds that flowed from the right, Panini gave shape to Sanskrit, while Agastya turned the sounds from the left into Tamil. We have here an excellent example of how tradition can conceal much ancient knowledge behind charming stories: is this tale not telling us that Tamil and Sanskrit flow from the same source? Which is exactly what Sri Aurobindo found by studying the roots of these two languages.

All this does not mean that there is nothing distinctive about Dravidian tradition; South India can justly be proud of its ancient culture. But it does means that the South Indian scholars or politicians who today continue to assert that the ancient Dravidians had "nothing in common with the

Indo-Aryan races of North India" and have been "oppressed" by the Aryans, or who continue to produce imaginary maps of Dravidians migrations from the North under the Aryan impact, choose to rely on jaundiced nineteenth-century European Sanskritists in complete disregard not only of all available evidence, but also of their own tradition.*

The Indus-Saraswati Civilization

These points alone should be enough for an objective mind to reject the ill-conceived theory.

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* The idea of Dravidian migrations from the North was first put forth by Bishop Caldwell, who insisted that the Dravidians had "invaded" India long before the Aryans. As it has no basis whatsoever in tradition, history or archaeology, it has tried to draw linguistic support from the presence of "Dravidian-speaking" pockets in Baluchistan (the Brahuis), and in Eastern and Central India. But the linguistic field is notoriously amenable to every scholar's cherished theory, and gives rise to the most contradictory explanations for the smallest problem. In the present instance, the very definition of what constitutes a Dravidian language is open to question; the language of the Todas in the Nilgiris, for example, is said to be Dravidian, yet no one has been able to relate the core of its most ancient vocabulary—sacred words found in the Todas' prayers—to known Dravidian languages. Only when they realize that the so-called "Dravidian family" of languages is closely related to the "Indo-European" family, in other words that "proto-Dravidian" and "proto-Sanskrit" are one and the same, will our scholars become equipped to tackle the linguistic puzzle.

But let us now see what archaeology has to say in the matter.

In 1920-22, Indian archaeologists exploring the Indus valley sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro began to excavate towns that were clearly far more ancient than anything previously found in India. In the years that followed, many more such sites came to light farther afield, revealing not only the extent but also the advanced stage of this civilization. It was at first called the Indus Valley or Harappan civilization, but as its highest concentration has later been found, as we will soon see, along the dry bed of the Saraswati, it is now increasingly given the more precise names of Indus-Saraswati or Saraswati-Sindhu civilization. It flourished from about 3500 to 1900 BC. With some 1500 sites discovered so far, we now know that it extended much farther than initially thought, in the west to the borders of Iran, in the north to Turkmenia, Bactria beyond the Hindu Kush range, the foot of the Pamir mountains in Tadzhikistan, and Kashmir, in the south all the way to the Godavari valley, and beyond Delhi in the east—an area of over two million square kilometres, far larger than the contemporary civilizations in Egypt or Mesopotamia.

It was undoubtedly one of the greatest civilizations ever. Perhaps its most striking feature is the sophistication of its urban development, with town-planning of a level that would be found only 2000 years later in Europe. Geometrically designed, the towns had fortifications (probably for protection against both intruders and floods), several distinct quarters, assembly halls, granaries, and



The "Great Bath" at Mohenjo-daro

manufacturing units; the bigger cities had industries, such as furnaces for the production of copper tools, weapons or ornaments; public baths (which are likely to have been part of temples), private baths often for all inhabitants, sewerage through underground drains built with precisely laid bricks, and an efficient system of water management with wells and reservoirs testify to the care that was taken of the ordinary inhabitant. All this made the British archaeologist John Marshall, who enlarged the excavations started by Rakhaldas Banerji at Mohenjo-daro, remark in wonder: "There is nothing that we know of in prehistoric Egypt or Mesopotamia or anywhere else in Western Asia to compare with the well-built baths and commodious houses of the citizens of Mohenjo-daro. In those countries, much money and thought were lavished on the building of magnificent temples for the gods and on the palaces and tombs of kings, but the rest of the people seemingly had to content themselves with insignificant dwellings of mud. In the Indus Valley, the picture is reversed and the finest structures are those erected for the convenience of the citizens."[5]

The Indus-Saraswati civilization derived part of its prosperity from commerce, and much evidence

has been found of flourishing overseas trade with Oman, Bahrain, and Sumer; it is known for instance that exchanges with the Sumerians went on for at least seven centuries. Excavations at sites along the coast of Kutch and Saurashtra in Gujarat have revealed a maritime power which established merchant colonies in Bahrain and the Euphrates-Tigris valley. Lothal, in particular, boasts the first dockyard and tidal lock in the world. As regards the crafts that produced the materials exported, the Indus-Saraswati people made beads, carved ivory, worked shells, cast bronze, baked pottery, and engraved with remarkable artistry their famous seals (which were documents of the rulers, merchants or priests). Their efficiency was enhanced by the use of standardized bricks and tools, and of a highly evolved system of units for lengths and weights; they in fact invented the first decimal system of measurement, which was at the root of their town-planning; compasses carved out of conch shells have been found, which may have served to measure angles between stars for navigation. Dancing, painting, sculpture, and music (there is evidence of stringed instruments) were all prominent in their culture. Fine jewellery has been unearthed in abundance, also a probable ancestor

of the game of chess. Children too seem not to have been neglected, judging from the exquisite care with which toys were fashioned.

Necessarily, agriculture was practised on a wide scale, with hundreds of rural settlements and extensive networks of canals for irrigation; wheat, barley, rice, several vegetables, and cotton were some of the common crops. The oldest excavated site, Mehrgarh, at the foot of the Bolan Pass in Baluchistan, which extends over an area of more than 200 hectares, goes back to 7000 BC and shows "a veritable agricultural economy solidly established as early as 6000 BC."[6] But the most important discovery at Mehrgarh is its longest sequence of cultures, spanning some 4000 years and leading to the Indus civilization, with no break or disruption from outside.

Another pillar of the Indus-Saraswati civilization was an efficient administration enforcing uniform laws over all the provinces and ensuring that the society remained well-knit. Every major town had its ruler, who with his entourage had his residence in a separate quarter, usually the upper part of the town, while in the other quarters, the wealthy and the less wealthy often lived side by side. The renowned Indian archaeologist, S. R.

Rao, notes: "The Harappans were a highly disciplined people conscious of their civic duties which explains the meticulous care taken to keep the cities clean. No encroachment of streets is seen for over 500 years at Lothal in spite of the fact that the houses had to be rebuilt several times after the havoc wrought by floods.... The story of the rise and decline of the Indus Civilization is an epitome of man's struggle for conquering nature and building an integrated peace-loving and prosperous society. In this struggle the Harappans seem to have succeeded to a large extent."[7]

Lest the reconstructed picture of the Saraswati civilization should appear too rosy, we must remember that it is inevitably incomplete; yet it is enough to make our modern boasts of "progress" sound somewhat incongruous.

A Comedy of Errors

Soon after the discovery of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, their remote dates signaled the start of a virtual comedy of errors. At first, all the archaeologists and historians who had unquestioningly accepted the invasion theory felt compelled to

conclude that this civilization was "pre-Aryan," and therefore pre-Vedic; they also assumed that it must have been Dravidian, although once again they had nothing to show in support of this gratuitous postulate. On the contrary, the study of skeletons found at some sites (notably in Sind, Punjab and Gujarat) has shown that the physical types were on the whole quite similar to what they still are in those regions.[8]

It was then propounded that a number of skeletons found at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa were proof of the conquests of the incoming Aryans —"Indra stands accused," declared the British archaeologist Mortimer Wheeler, one of the most fervid invasionists,* with a fine sense of drama (Indra being of course the chief of the "Aryan" gods). Unfortunately, there was little more than drama in this indictment: among its most glaring inconsistencies, the owners of the said skeletons were later proved to have died of natural causes, and at widely varying times: "A restudy of Wheeler's

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* In 1948, Wheeler, rebuffed by Sardar Patel after a show of arrogance, left India and went to Pakistan; two years later, he published a book entitled *Five Thousand Years of Pakistan*. "Suddenly, an absolutely new nation was claimed to be the ancient-most," says S. P. Gupta. Archaeology or politics?

stratigraphy ... clearly indicated that the so-called 'invaded' were not present when the so-called 'invaders' came,"[9] writes S. R. Rao, tongue in cheek. Moreover, neither weapons nor any signs of war were found at the sites of those imagined battles: "Where are the burned fortresses, the arrow heads, weapons, pieces of armour, the smashed chariots and bodies of the invaders and defenders?" asks the American archaeologist G. F. Dales. "Despite the extensive excavations at the largest Harappan sites, there is not a single bit of evidence that can be brought forth as unconditional proof of an armed conquest and the destruction on the supposed scale of the Aryan invasion."[10] Poor Indra must have heaved a heavenly sigh of relief.

Some Western scholars have a special fondness for phallic cults and will see them everywhere (as in the worship of the Shiva lingam, though it has nothing of a phallic cult). Here, they did not fail to identify certain conical and hemispherical stones as part of such a "pre-Aryan" cult; but upon deeper study, these stones turned out to be innocent weights. As for the ancient Indian swastika, they had decided it was a symbol brought by the Aryans; here too they were in bad luck, for the

swastika was found on some Indus seals.

Also, on the basis of "linguistic evidence" it had been assumed that the Aryans brought the horse to India, and that the Indus-Saraswati inhabitants, ignorant of this noble animal, were all the more easily defeated; as a result the first horse bones excavated in Indus sites were promptly declared to belong to a species of donkey! This umpteenth myth has now been demolished, and abundant proof of the ancient existence of the horse in India is available in the form of both skeletal remains at numerous Indus-Saraswati sites and even older cave paintings (some going back to 30000 BC).[11] The maligned horse can hold its head high again.

Other such fanciful hypotheses followed on what was supposed to be present or absent in the Indus-Saraswati towns, which we need not go into here, except to note that not one of them has been able to stand when confronted with hard evidence; that, however, has not prevented some of our historians, always behind the times, to continue clutching at these straws: "If you cannot refute the evidence, simply ignore it" seems to be their motto. S. P. Gupta is forced to remark: "The tragedy is that, by and large, the Indian historians have very little understanding of field-archaeology and they

just make a mess when they use archaeological evidence."[12]

We must finally stress a negative observation on which all archaeologists agree: no findings have been made in the Indus-Saraswati region which could be associated with an Aryan people coming into India—neither pottery nor utensils nor tools nor weapons nor graves nor any form of art; surprisingly the "invaders," who swamped a large part of India (in spite of her already considerable population), have left no trace of their arrival. Were the Indus-Saraswati civilization indeed "pre-Aryan," we would have the strange paradox pointed out by the American Vedic scholar David Frawley:[13] On the one hand its people, though highly literate, would have left behind no literature—only a huge physical presence now brought to light by archaeology; and on the other hand, the alleged Aryans, admittedly illiterate, handed down to us an enormous literature, yet left no physical trace of any sort!

Cultural Continuity

After disposing of this "negative" evidence, it is time to take a closer look at the real nature of the culture supporting the Indus-Saraswati civilization.

We may first note that the Rig-Veda contains not only numerous references to ships and navigation, but also to great cities, to trade and industry,[14] all of which are as consistent with the Indus-Saraswati civilization as they are inconsistent with pastoral nomads from Central Asia.

Then we find many Indus seals depicting deities, seated or standing in yogic postures; one of the best known is the figure of the so-called Pasupati* (Lord of the beasts), the awe-inspiring three-faced deity seated in *padmasana*, with seven V-shaped lines on his chest and seven more on his headgear, surrounded by a buffalo, a rhinoceros, an elephant and a tiger, and with two deer beneath his throne. It was Marshall who assumed the deity to be a sort of proto-Shiva, and therefore "non-Aryan." But S. R. Rao interprets the inscription on this seal to be *rama-trida-oshā*, "pleasant and burning in

* See its reproduction on the front cover.

three ways," and identifies the deity with Agni,[15] whom the Rig-Veda constantly describes in his triple aspect; moreover the Veda contains many references to the "seven-headed thought," "seven-rayed knowledge," etc. Even if the deity were indeed Shiva, the Rig-Veda gives him a sufficient place to reject the "non-Aryan" thesis. Evidence of worship of a Mother Goddess too was sought to be used in support of this thesis, forgetting conveniently the prominent place given in the Veda to goddesses such as Usha, Aditi, Prithwi, Saraswati, etc. On many seals also we see the representation of a magnificent bull, a frequent symbol of Agni and Indra (among others) in the Veda; other seals show a deity standing beneath an arch of flame. By themselves, therefore, these seals are, at the very least, strongly suggestive of Vedic culture.



Several Indus sites have yielded terracotta human figurines depicting yogic asanas. A seal shows a yogi taming a tiger. The stone statue of a "priest" found at Mohenjo-daro, more likely a yogi, shows

him in deep concentration, his half-closed eyes fixed on the tip of his nose.* It is thus clear that the Indus-Saraswati people practised yoga.

We find, too, widespread fire worship, common to all provinces, with fire and sacrificial altars often in individual homes. Not only is the Rig-Veda replete with hymns to the divine Fire, but the Sulbasutras provide a precise description of these fire altars, their design and construction. Let us remember that the Sutras, texts often of a technical nature, were posterior to the Brahmanas, themselves posterior to the Rig-Veda; yet the Veda is supposed to have been brought into India by the invading Aryans some 2000 years after these fire altars were built according to the instructions of the Sulbasutras! Conversely, if, as seems natural, the Sulbasutras are contemporary with the Indus-Saraswati civilization (other considerations confirm this, as we will see), the inescapable conclusion is that this civilization was post-Vedic, and that the Veda must have been composed by 4000 BC, possibly earlier.

One more proof of the Vedic nature of the Indus-Saraswati civilization lies in its language,

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* See its reproduction on the frontispiece.

brief records of which are found inscribed on hundreds of seals in the mysterious "Indus script." Its decipherment is as important as that of Egyptian hieroglyphics by Champollion, but has been made more difficult by the brevity of the extant records (most have only a few signs, the longest having 26), and by the absence of any sort of multilingual Rosetta stone. The picture was further complicated by the Aryan invasion theory, which for decades led scholars astray by making them presuppose that the Indus language could only have been a form of ancient Tamil, or some proto-Dravidian language. Linguists, including Russian and Finnish teams working with the help of computers, laboured in this attempt to force the Indus script to conform to their theories and yield the Dravidian readings they had predetermined; in so doing they had to assign widely varying values to the same sign (just as nineteenth-century Sanskritists gave varying meanings to the same word in the Veda so as to make it mean what they liked). The Indian linguist Shrikant Talageri comments: "Using these arbitrary and whimsical methods, it is not very surprising that these scholars came up with a hundred, even diametrically opposite, 'readings' for any single seal."[16]

The archaeologist S. R. Rao, starting without any such presupposition regarding the nature of the language behind the Indus-Saraswati script, was able to proceed much farther. Over years of painstaking research, he traced the evolution and simplification of the script through time, and identified its basic signs; he then noticed that many of them were similar to signs found in certain Semitic scripts of the time; giving these signs the value they are known to have in those scripts, and keeping consistently to these same values, he obtained words akin to Sanskrit such as *atri, bhaga, arka, kashyapa, bhadra, ashwa*, etc. Most of the seals turned out to be addressed to various gods, praising them and invoking their protection or power or friendship. (A few years later, the Indologist Subhash Kak independently confirmed the Indus script's connection with Sanskrit.) S. R. Rao's decipherment has been gaining acceptance worldwide, though much more slowly than it should have, running counter as it does to the "established" view: if the language of the Indus-Saraswati civilization was a form of Sanskrit as the seals indicate (precisely which form remains to be determined), then it becomes plainly meaningless to characterize this civilization as "pre-Aryan."

As is now clear (except to those who do not want to see), it was nothing of the sort, but Vedic in the broad sense of the term, i.e. with its culture rooted in the Veda. Nothing has been dug out of six-thousand-year-old soil that shows a break with Vedic culture as it still exists in India under its present form of Hinduism. Even Marshall, who accepted the Aryan invasion theory wholesale like almost everyone else in his time, could not help observing:

> "Taken as a whole, their [the Indus Valley people's] religion is so characteristically Indian as *hardly to be distinguished from still living Hinduism*.... One thing that stands out both at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa is that the civilization hitherto revealed at these two places is not an incipient civilization, but one already age-old and stereotyped on Indian soil, with many millennia of human endeavour behind it."[17]

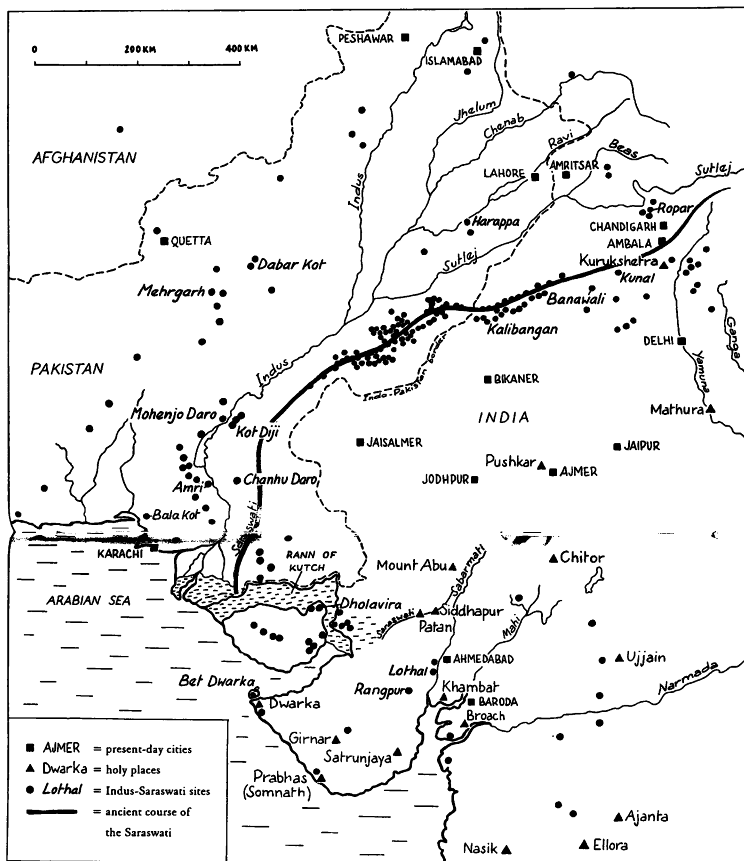
Millennia behind it, millennia after it. A cultural continuity without parallel anywhere else in the world.

The Mighty Saraswati

The Veda, as we know, lavishly honours the river Saraswati. The great river has been found again—rather its long dried-up bed, traced over the last century by numerous archaeologists (notably V. S. Wakankar in the eighties and early nineties), and confirmed by satellite photography. It flowed down from the Siwalik Hills at the foot of the Himalayas, touched the plains near Ambala in Punjab, then ran in a course roughly parallel to the Indus, through the Ghaggar valley, the Rajasthan desert, and finally the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat.* There it emptied into the Arabian sea through a huge delta which extended over several hundred kilometres along the Western coast, from the present delta of the Indus to that of the Narmada.

It was indeed a mighty river, three to ten kilometres in width, with at one time the Sutlej and the Yamuna as its tributaries; the Saraswati system seems to have been fed by the millennial melting of the icecaps and glaciers accumulated in

* See map on the following pages.



This map shows the chief sites of the Indus-Saraswati civilization, with their greatest concentration along the rediscovered course of the Saraswati – rather one of its courses, as the Saraswati shifted its course several times owing to floods and earthquakes. It once had the Sutlej and the Yamuna as its tributaries, and was in fact a vast river system covering much of present-day Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Sind, and Gujarat, where it ended in a broad delta extending over several hundred kilometres along India's Western coast.

the Himalayas during the last Ice Age, which ended about 10000 BC. Detailed studies have shown that the Saraswati changed course several times owing to floods and earthquakes (which probably diverted the Sutlej towards the Indus and the Yamuna eastward); evidence has also been found of a great drought lasting over centuries which caused the Saraswati to break into several segments, and finally dry up completely around 2000 BC.

It is remarkable that what first guided archaeologists in their quest for the "lost Saraswati" was local tradition, especially that which still identifies with the Vedic river today's small and now seasonal Saraswati in Haryana and Punjab, which joins with the Ghaggar. This is all the more remarkable as this tradition has been carried for no less than 4000 years—for a people whom European scholars liked to describe as "devoid of historical sense," the Indians have done pretty well.* Moreover, we find in the Rig-Veda, the Mahabharata and several

* Let us note the existence of another small Saraswati in Gujarat, which flows from the southern tip of the Aravalli hills, not far from Mount Abu, in a south-western direction until it disappears into the sands of Kutch. Several towns along its course, including Siddhapur and Patan (see map) are holy places associated in legends ...

Puranas hints to the river's location (in the form of holy places), its physical characteristics, even the stages of its drying: the Rig-Veda, for instance, says the great river flows "from the mountain to the sea," while the Mahabharata describes it as disappearing into the sands, which suggests it had lost the Yamuna and the Sutlej by then. Yet the invasion theory forcibly dates all these scriptures later than 1000 BC, a thousand years after the Saraswati went dry!

The rediscovery of the Saraswati deals a death-blow to the invasion theory. Who will believe that the Aryans crossed up to six great rivers—the Indus and the Sutlej with its tributaries—only to settle down on the banks of a river that had gone dry *five hundred years* earlier, and went on to worship it as "best of mothers, best of rivers, best of goddesses"

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with the ancient Saraswati. A branch of its vast delta may have flowed there, or a later course to the south of the dry bed identified by archaeologists.

Let us also note that the mythical presence of the Saraswati at Prayag, where she meets the Ganga and the Yamuna, can clearly be traced to the time when the Yamuna flowed into the Saraswati.

As for the Vedic Drishadvati, it has been found too, identified with the bed of the Chautang river, another small seasonal river, which runs for the most part in Haryana, parallel to the Ghaggar, south of it.

(Rig-Veda, II.41.16)? It is clear that the Vedic people who sang hymns in praise of the Saraswati lived along its banks while it was in full flow. And as a matter of fact, archaeologists did not just discover a dry bed: they found a multitude of Indus-Saraswati sites along its course—some 700 to be more precise, of all sizes—against a hundred or so along the Indus. This explains why the initial name of "Indus Valley civilization" is inadequate: it is the Saraswati that was clearly the centre of gravity of this civilization, in fact its life-giving river. But more importantly, these hundreds of settlements provide one more proof of the Vedic nature of this civilization, or rather post-Vedic nature, since there are signs (such as the presence of settlements in the middle of the dry bed) that the Saraswati had already started its decline from 3000 BC, while it flowed in full strength at the time of the Rig-Veda.

The great drought (2200-1900 BC) which ended the Saraswati in fact affected a very large area, causing also the collapse of the Sumerian civilization of Mesopotamia. In the Indian subcontinent, it was not the only cataclysm to strike: there is evidence too of floods in the Indus (following its acquisition of the Sutlej), of seismic activity which

shifted the course of several rivers, even of severe ecological imbalance apparently caused by deforestation (is this reflected in the story of Anaranya, an ancestor of Rama who is said to have cut forests on a large scale?). All these, along with a dwindling foreign trade, contributed to bring about the decline of the Indus-Saraswati civilization over a few centuries, forcing some of its people to move eastward towards the new course of the Yamuna, and further towards the Ganga. There, their descendants built another great civilization.

Dwaraka

Let us now pay a visit to Dwaraka, on the eastern tip of Saurashtra in Gujarat, the legendary town of Lord Krishna. Legendary? In the 1980s, the discovery of massive submerged walls revealed the existence of a major ancient port in modern Dwarka and another in the nearby island of Bet-Dwarka, which served as a gateway to the subcontinent. This corroborated the story of the submergence of Krishna's city, regarded till now as a "myth" from the Mahabharata. Although the Dwaraka findings, carbon-dated to about 1500 BC, do not as yet fit

with the traditional date ascribed to Krishna's time (let us however venture to suggest that further exploration may reveal more ancient remains), even this "recent" date is incompatible with semiprimitive Aryan tribes creating a great urban civilization immediately upon their arrival! Or else, if, as archaeological evidence shows, the Dwaraka ruins are a late development of the Indus-Saraswati civilization, what becomes of its association with "Aryan" Krishna, or at least (if Krishna is denied the honour of a physical existence) with the "Aryan" Mahabharata? Could this self-inflicted puzzle be the reason why S. R. Rao's rediscovery of ancient Dwaraka has not attracted the degree of attention which that of ancient Troy by Schliemann did?

More Evidence

Is further proof needed? Well, there is still plenty of it.

From astronomy, since the Vedic symbolism is shown to refer to celestial events such as solstices and equinoxes which can be dated to between 4000 and 6000 BC.[18] An Indian astronomer, B. G.

Siddharth, finds in the Krishna Yajur Veda a clear reference to solstices around 8500 BC,[19] which would of course make the Rig-Veda older than that. As for the Brahmanas and Sutras, which followed the Veda, they yield dates in the vicinity of 3000 BC.[20]

From mathematics, as the American mathematician A. Seidenberg has shown that ancient Egyptian, Babylonian and Greek geometries derive from the mathematics recorded in the Sulbasutras.[21] This confirms that these Sutras are older than 2000 BC (date of Egypt's Middle Kingdom and of the Old Babylonian Empire where this geometric knowledge first appears), and therefore contemporary with the Indus-Saraswati civilization—which is not surprising since, as we have seen, these ancient kinds of technical manuals are at the basis of the remarkably planned towns of the time and of their elaborate fire altars.

From metallurgy, as a bronze statue found in Delhi in 1958 by an American collector, and dated by several laboratories to 3700-3800 BC, shows the remarkably powerful head of a Rishi. Its discoverer, Harry Hicks, who barely saved it from being melted for scrap, identified it with

Rishi Vasishtha,* relying on the Rig-Veda (for instance VII.33.1 in praise of Vasishtha: "These who bear hair-knots on the right . . ."). Whether or not this identification is correct, the head's remote date is one more confirmation of the ancientness of the Vedic age.

A Decent Burial

The Aryan invasion theory is so riddled with inconsistencies that other compelling arguments and pieces of evidence against it are not lacking. But this should be enough. It is in fact not a "theory" but a dogma, which has to be accepted on faith. Like all dogmas, it falls to dust when examined objectively. Its defendants find themselves very much in the position of the geocentric astronomers of the Middle Ages who were compelled to assign highly convoluted and unnatural orbits to the planets in order to keep them revolving around the earth. Our invasionist historians, like India's

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* See a reproduction on p.109 (courtesy Dr. N. S. Rajaram). This statue is now at the Center for Cultural Preservation at Menlo Park, California.

former colonial masters, are not shy of tying themselves into knots, as long as they can somehow preserve the non-Indian origin of India's civilization. It is a pathetic spectacle that they offer, pretending that nothing has happened in archaeology since the last century that requires them to take a new look at their theories.

No doubt, there have been many attempts to modify the dogma so as to circumvent the emerging archaeological evidence. Chameleon-like, the Aryan invasion theory has changed colour time and again and given birth to dozens of variations on the same theme, which saw the Aryans enter India at dates ranging any time between 1500 and 8000 BC, and from any region between Scandinavia and Siberia, Iran and Tibet. Need we add that like their protean mother-theory, all these offspring have been based on no more than wild conjectures?

Archaeologists, on the other hand, stand on surer ground. All of them agree, let us repeat, that nothing has ever been unearthed that could be associated with an Aryan people. Some, while still feeling obliged to show token respect for the invasion theory, acknowledge, if shyly, that "the Aryans' arrival does not constitute an actual cultural hiatus, so that it is hard to define with precision what is

customarily called 'Aryan invasion'."[22] But more and more of them are increasingly categorical. We have referred the Indian archaeologists S. R. Rao and S. P. Gupta as noted opponents of the invasion theory, and should add the names of Dilip K. Chakrabarti and K. M. Srivastava among the better known. Let us end by quoting the American archaeologist Jim Shaffer, who stated in 1984 :

> "Linguistic data were used [by the invasion theory] to validate the concept [of Indo-Aryans] that in turn was used to interpret archaeological and anthropological data. What was theory became unquestioned fact.... It is time to end this 'linguistic tyranny'.... Current archaeological data do not support the existence of an Indo-Aryan or European invasion into South Asia any time in the pre- or protohistoric periods. Instead, it is possible to document archaeologically a series of cultural changes reflecting indigenous cultural developments from prehistoric to historic periods."[23]

It is time to give the Aryan invasion theory a decent burial, to the vibrant sounds, if we may suggest, of Vedic hymns.

IV. The Core of Civilization

The distorting and smoky glass which the Aryan invasion theory imposed on India's past has been shattered, and it is only a matter of time before all the pieces are removed. Meanwhile, it is tempting to take a brief look at the emerging picture and try to make out a few broad lines. But we must keep in mind that it has begun to emerge only a few years ago, and, naturally enough, we are still far from complete agreement on all the salient points among the representatives of what has been called the "new school" in Indian history: much remains to be integrated into the new perspective. Nevertheless, we can now breathe more freely.

Also, we should not forget that archaeology in India, though it has worked on a very extensive field in the face of great difficulties (scanty means and bureaucratic red tape in particular), has after all barely scratched the surface. To give only two

examples, the vast majority of the identified Indus-Saraswati sites are yet to be excavated, and it is certain that they would have much crucial evidence to yield; even more so with marine archaeology along India's shores, which has only recently begun and has already shown great promise at Dwaraka and Poompuhar. "Everything tends to show that there must be the remains of other civilisations yet undiscovered. We cannot have exhausted all that the earth contains,"[1] wrote Sri Aurobindo in 1913. That may still be just as true today.

Perhaps the central point now established is the extreme antiquity of the Veda. Though the Indian tradition and seers had always held the Veda to be "many thousands of years old,"[1] Max Müller brought this down to 1200 BC.* But the undeniably Vedic nature of the Indus-Saraswati civilization has pushed this date back to at least 4000 BC; some linguists arrive at 5000 BC,[3] and we have seen that astronomical symbolism in the Veda alludes to still

* It is little known that Max Müller reached this date after pseudo-calculations based on nothing but the Biblical chronology in vogue in his time, which insisted that the world had been created on October 23, 4004 BC![2] Not surprisingly, he was strongly critical of Darwin's theory of evolution, and published articles against it.

more remote dates, with an astronomer even going beyond 9000 BC. Whatever the exact date, tradition has been proved right in this respect. This would have come as no surprise to Voltaire, who remarked with much common sense: "It does not behove us, who were only savages and barbarians when these Indian and Chinese peoples were civilized and learned, to dispute their antiquity."[4]

But the Vedic tradition clearly goes much farther into the past than the Rig-Veda itself, for its hymns frequently refer to "human fathers" *(pitaro manusyah)* and to "ancient" Rishis in contrast to the "modern" authors of the hymns: "Our actual Sanhita," infers Sri Aurobindo, "represents the close of a period, not its commencement, nor even some of its successive stages.... The whole voluminous mass of its litanies may be only a selection by Veda Vyasa out of a more richly vocal Aryan past."[5] We have before us by far the oldest tradition in the world, carried to us across 6000 or 8000 years or more through meticulous oral repetition from one generation to the next.

Can we go farther into the past? Although paleontologists have already pushed back "modern man" to 100,000 years ago,[6] Mehrgarh in Baluchistan and a few other sites such as Nevali Cori in

Anatolia date "only" from 7000-8000 BC; there are as yet few older signs of "civilization," which does not mean that none will come to light. We should not forget that archaeology, like all our sciences, is after all only in its infancy. Also, an unspoken assumption underlying all modern research is that human society evolved in a straight line from the "primitive" stage; but that is no more than an assumption: "European scholarship," wrote Sri Aurobindo, "regards human civilisation as a recent progression starting yesterday with the Fiji islander and ending today with Haeckel and Rockefeller, conceiving ancient culture as necessarily primitive culture and primitive culture as necessarily half savage culture.[7] It is a superstition of modern thought that the march of knowledge has in all its parts progressed always in a line of forward progress.[8] I will ... suppose at least that there was a great Vedic age of advanced civilization broken afterwards by Time and circumstance.... It is probable that this ancient culture had none of those material conveniences on which we vaunt ourselves —but it may have had others of a higher, possibly even a more potent kind."[8] Admittedly, this takes us far ahead of our science. Yet if we will put aside for a moment our twentieth-century spectacles, we

will see throughout the Age of Mysteries, from Chaldea to Memphis, from Iran to the Mayas and from Eleusis to the Druids and the Norse mythology, traces of this "ancient culture," which saw the same cosmic powers flow and work and fight through a river, a mountain, a man under the stars, which worshipped the great play of the universe in a small flame, and invited friendly gods to break our petty limits. Our vision of "prehistory" is terribly inadequate. We have not yet rid our minds from the hold of a one-and-only God or one-and-only Book, and now a one-and-only Science. This narrowness of vision, which swept away the "Age of Intuition," will have to go before we witness the "revolution in knowledge" Sri Aurobindo foresaw.

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The ancientness of the Veda once established, the Epics, the Brahmanas and Sutras, the Puranas will also benefit from this "ageing" process: their previous recent dates, fixed as arbitrarily as that of the Veda, are being similarly pushed back. This revision will make it easier to extract from them their historical content, which scholars had often discarded simply because it contradicted the

"established" chronology. How far the long dynasties of ancient kings, for instance, agree with the new chronology will be interesting to see. This is not to say that everything in the Scriptures or tradition is historical: much evidently mixes in a knowledge of the inner worlds put in a symbolic language full of imagery (such as the Puranas' description of alternate concentric circles of continents and oceans). But there is certainly a mine of information that remains to be sifted. And a mine of human-divine powers to be explored.

Also, the achievements of ancient India in many fields and their impact on the rest of the world call for reconsideration.

We have seen that the Babylonians and ancient Greeks learned their mathematics from the Indians, who by 3000 BC had made much progress in the field. Indian astronomy, too, usually thought to have been born a few centuries BC, will be shown to be much more ancient. The discovery by Subhash Kak of an astronomical code embedded in the Rig-Veda[9] has led to new insights in this field, showing that the ancient Rishis knew the distance between the Sun and the Earth to be about 108 times the Sun's diameter (the same with the Moon's distance from the Earth), had observed the periods of the

five planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn), and determined the solar year to last between 365 and 366 days—all this several thousand years before similar knowledge showed up in Egypt, Babylonia or Greece.

In the linguistic field, the hypothetical Indo-European language is bound to be largely discarded, based as it is on the mistaken assumption that Sanskrit, brought to India by the imaginary Aryans, *derived* from it. If at all some of the reconstructed forms are linguistically valid, they will be shown to have, on the contrary, derived from the far more ancient Sanskrit. As for Sanskrit itself, its common ancestry with the Dravidian languages may well provide a few glimpses on what proto-Sanskrit (or again, proto-Dravidian, if we prefer) might have been.* Also, the Indus-Saraswati

* It is interesting to note that around 1912-1914, Sri Aurobindo, engrossed in his deep study of the Veda, experimented at the same time with communications received inwardly through various faculties (*lipi* in particular), and noted down in his personal notebooks a few passages—some several pages long—in Devanagari script, whose language seems akin to but is not Sanskrit, and is hardly intelligible.[10] He himself calls it "Old Sanskrit" or "Old Aryabhasha." Perhaps some future, unblinkered linguists will be able to make use of these specimens, as well as of his far-reaching research into the roots and origins of the "Aryan" language.

script, now shown to have evolved over the centuries into the Semitic scripts on the one hand, and the Brahmi script on the other, clearly becomes the origin of all other scripts (except the Chinese and its derivatives).

Mathematics, astronomy, language, script; the zero, the first decimal system, the so-called Arabic (but really Indian) numerals, the alphabet.... We have come full circle, back to the eighteenth-century thinkers who saw in India the source of all civilization. Let us turn to Voltaire one last time, who wrote in 1773:

> "It is very important to note that some 2,500 years ago at the least Pythagoras went from Samos to the Ganges to learn geometry.... But he would certainly not have undertaken such a strange journey had the reputation of the Brahmans' science not been long established in Europe.... We have already acknowledged that arithmetic, geometry, astronomy were taught among the Brahmans. From time immemorial they have known the precession of the equinoxes and were in their calculation far closer to the real figure than the Greeks who came much later.... Mr. Le Gentil [a French astronomer who spent several years in India] has with admiration acknowledged the Brahmans' science, as well as the

> immensity of time these Indians must have needed to reach a knowledge of which even the Chinese never had any notion, and which was unknown to Egypt and to Chaldea, the teacher of Egypt."[11]

All this is now confirmed year after year by mounting evidence which the invasion dogma had perforce suppressed.

Yet however momentous these discoveries are, however great their impact will be on our knowledge of the ancient world, they will for some time remain in the academic domain. Are there meanwhile practical lessons, of immediate concern to us, to be drawn from the ancient Vedic hymns, from the long-dry Saraswati, from the dusty ruins on its banks and those of the Indus?

There are certainly two.

The first is the confirmation of the essential continuity of India's history through the ages: the Vedic Age maturing long before 4000 BC, followed by the Indus-Saraswati civilization which was its natural outgrowth, and by the Ganga civilization after the drying of the Saraswati. Whatever twists and turns the Indian civilization may have followed, whatever migrations may have taken place to and from India, nothing in Indian tradition or

in archaeology justifies a rigid break between pre- and post-Aryan India; nothing warrants the fallacy of a sharp demarcation between Aryan and Dravidian races, languages, civilizations, even deities. Let us recall that some sites of the Indus-Saraswati civilization have shown a continuous evolution for up to 4000 years, and that nowhere have signs of war or abrupt disruption been found, except for that caused by natural calamities. It is safe to predict that future archaeological findings will further confirm the essential continuity of the Indian civilization. The neat little labels our Westernized mind has stuck on it after cutting it into well-defined bits—Vedism, Brahminism, Hinduism, and so forth—are irrelevant. The river flowing down the mountains, then through forests, and finally meandering through the plains is one and the same. Continuity in time, and continuity in space: "In India at a very early time the spiritual and cultural unity was made complete and became the very stuff of the life of all this great surge of humanity between the Himalayas and the two seas,"[12] stresses Sri Aurobindo. Each region of India certainly has its own character, its peculiar stamp, but none can find its fulfilment without keeping alive this underlying unity and essential

commonness. Denying it would be the surest way to disintegration.

The second lesson is that no civilization can last without some inherent strength at its foundation; if this strength is for any reason exhausted, the civilization is doomed whatever its apparent achievements. The barely three-century old Western scientific and technological civilization, which has erected dazzling constructions on the foundation of greed and plunder, is now showing all the signs of advanced decay; its "red evening" is already a deepening (and sickening) night, and its few lucid thinkers are wondering how long it can go on in its chosen direction. It might well be the shortest-lived civilization the earth will have borne—unless it takes a leaf or two out of the Indian book: "Asia is long-lived, Europe brief, ephemeral," said Sri Aurobindo. "Europe lives by centuries, Asia by millenniums.... Everything in Europe is small, rapid and short lived; she has not the secret of immortality."[13]

That is why just a week before his death in 1894, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who gave India the Mantra of freedom, exhorted young Bengalis thus:

> "Do not lose your reverence for the past; it is on the past that you must plant your foot firmly, if

> you wish to mount high in the future. You are not a race of savages who have no past to remember. You cannot dissever yourselves in a day from the associations and influences of a past which extends over at least five hundred centuries. You cannot annihilate in a day a past national existence which has survived the annihilation of hundreds of empires, of hundred systems of religion, and which has surveyed unconcerned the downfall and ruin of many kindred civilizations. I have to make my warning so emphatic because the general tendency of European scholars, who have so great an influence over you, is to decry your past history, to call for its virtual erasure from your memory, and to lead you in the opposite direction."[14]

The Indian civilization has lasted through the millennia because it knew how to hold on to its essential strength and spirit, and how to evolve with it, never clinging to the forms of the moment (except in periods of stagnation, as in recent centuries). Today's challenges will not be overcome by abandoning this strength and spirit. Agni, the ancient Flame, can still be kindled in us; the Saraswati can still flow in us as it flowed in the Rishis of old.

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Why, one may ask in the end, should we worry so much over debunking a theory about our remote past? Precisely because it denies that remote past. Because it turns the Veda into a largely meaningless hodgepodge of superstition cobbled together by aboriginal savages. Because it makes nonsense of what has been for millennia the source of India's spiritual life and strength, and divides her into countless fragments destined to fly at each other's throat, instead of seeing them as the many facets of a single precious stone.

And because the past is never past, never dead, and often holds the key to the future.

> "The recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is not merely a desideratum for our modern intellectual curiosity, but a practical necessity for the future of the human race," says Sri Aurobindo. "For I firmly believe that the secret concealed in the Veda, when entirely discovered, will be found to formulate perfectly that knowledge and practice of a divine life to which the march of humanity, after long wanderings in the satisfaction of the intellect and senses, must inevitably return."[15]

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I

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Part Two

Song of Humanity

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः
तत् सवितुर्वरेण्यं
भर्गोदेवस्य धीमहि
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

OM BHŪR BHUVAH SWAH
TAT SAVITUR VARENYAM
BHARGO DEVASYA DHĪMAHI
DHIYO YO NAH PRACHODAYĀT

"O Lord, who pervades the earth,
the intermediate world and the world of light,
we meditate on the supreme light
of the illumining Sun-god,
that he may impel our mind."

Thus runs the Gayatri mantra,* the chosen formula of the ancient Vedic search. It is addressed to Surya, the Sun, "as a God of revelatory knowledge by whose action we can arrive at the highest truth." This "sacred Vedic formula, of the Gayatri,"

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* To my father Prithwi Singh Nahar's queries Sri Aurobindo gave the definitions of the following planes (10 Sept. 1937): *bhurloka* = material world; *bhuvarloka* = vital world; *dyuloka* = mind-world; *swarloka* = highest region of mind-world. The Rishis preferred a concrete language to an abstract one. *Bhu*, to them, meant the physical consciousness, and not just the earth.

observes Sri Aurobindo, "was for thousands of years repeated by every Brahmin in his daily meditation; and we may note that this formula is a verse from the Rig-veda, from a hymn of the Rishi Vishwamitra."

Ages ago, in the mid-twenties, Sri Aurobindo once asked a would-be disciple, "Do you know the meaning of the Gayatri Mantra?"

The man replied, "It is a great power, but I do not know the meaning."

Sri Aurobindo explained. "It means: 'We choose the Supreme Light of the divine Sun; we aspire that it may impel our minds.'

"The Sun is the symbol of the divine Light that is coming down and Gayatri gives expression to the aspiration asking that divine Light to come down and give impulsion to all the activities of the mind.

"In this Yoga also, we want to bring down that divine Sun to govern not only the mind but the vital and the physical being also. It is a very difficult effort. All cannot bear the Light of the Sun when it comes down. Gayatri chooses the Divine Light of the Truth asking it to come down and govern the mind. It is the capacity to bear the Light that constitutes the fitness for the Yoga."

Sri Aurobindo explains that SWAR, the solar world beyond heaven and earth, is the world of the divine Truth and Bliss; "the fourth world, the supramental," after mind, life and body.

Swar is the world of Yama.* Yama is the guardian of the law of the Truth, the guardian of immortality. It is the world of immortality where is the indestructible Light. "Yama and the ancient Fathers discovered the path to that world which is a pastùre of the Cows whence the enemy cannot bear away the radiant herds."

These and many other secrets of existence are to be found in Indian texts of Knowledge preserved by Hindus.

"At the root of all that we Hindus have done, thought and said through these many thousands of years, behind all we are and seek to be, there lies concealed, the fount of our philosophies, the bedrock of our religions, the kernel of our thought, the explanation of our ethics and society, the summary of our civilisation, the rivet of our nationality, a small body of speech, Veda. From this one seed

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* "Yama," explained Sri Aurobindo, "probably, is the Truth working on the physical aspect of the universe." (After the Veda, Yama became the Lord of Death; but Death only destroys what is not true. That is why he is the "guardian of immortality.")

developing into many forms the multitudinous and magnificent birth called Hinduism draws its inexhaustible existence. Buddhism too with its off-shoot, Christianity, flows from the same original source. It has left its stamp on Persia, through Persia on Judaism, through Judaism, Christianity and Sufism on Islam, and through Buddha on Confucianism, and through Christ and mediaeval mysticism, Greek and German philosophy and Sanskrit learning on the thought and civilisation of Europe. There is no part of the world's spirituality, of the world's religion, of the world's thought which would be what it is today, if the Veda had not existed. Of no other body of speech in the world can this be said."

The chants of the Veda are episodes of the lyrical epic of the soul in its immortal ascension. It is the high aspiring Song of Humanity.

There are four Vedas: the Rig, the Sama, the Yajur and the Atharva. "*Rik* means 'the intuitive movement in the mind'; *saman* is 'the rhythm of the movement and harmony.' *Atharva* means 'the effective action of the physical plane.'" The Rig-veda is known to be the most ancient of these ancient scriptures. "From the historical point of view," writes Sri Aurobindo, "the Rig-veda may

be regarded as a record of a great advance made by humanity by special means at a certain period of its collective progress." Indeed, the symbolism of the Veda depends upon the image of the life of man as a sacrifice, a journey and a battle. This scripture is "the spirit's hymn of battle and victory as it discovers and climbs to planes of thought and experience inaccessible to natural or animal man, man's praise of the divine Light, Power and Grace at work in the mortal." Unlike latter-day saints who rejected material life to swoon into some rarefied air, the Vedic Rishis were very much concerned with the life of the living being. The Veda speaks of two oceans; one is the ocean of the subconscient, dark and inexpressive, the other is the ocean of the superconscient, luminous and eternal expression but beyond the human mind. The upper sea or "the superconscient, the sea of the subconscient, the life of the living being between the two—this is the Vedic idea of existence."

Although the hymns record the experiences of different Rishis, the Rig-veda presents itself as one in all its parts. Seers of a single Truth they use a common language to express it. "They differ in temperament and personality," but we find the same firm foundation of knowledge in the powerful

and energetic hymns of Vishwamitra as in Vasishtha's even harmonies. These differences of manner take nothing from the unity of spiritual experiences. The above two along with a certain number of others ranked high as thinkers and sacred singers.

The Rishi is the Seer and the Hearer of Truth. For seerhood brings with it not only the far vision but the far hearing. As the eyes of the sage are opened to the light, so is his ear unsealed to receive the vibrations of the Infinite; from all the regions of the Truth there comes thrilling into him its Word which becomes the form of his thoughts.

Word-Formation

Actually, "the language of man is not framed on earth, but in heaven," Sri Aurobindo explained in an article, "as indeed are all things that the earth-soul uses in this mortal journey. By the threefold energy of eternal truth, manifesting force and sustaining delight everything is created as a type in the world of ideas, the *mahat* of the ancients, in the principle of self-manifest and



Vasishtha's head (see p. 80)

perfectly arranged knowledge, it is diversely developed by the more discursive but less sure-footed agencies of intellectual mind. Imagination hunts after new variations, memory and association corrupt, analogy perverts, sensation, emotion, pleasure seize violent and partial satisfaction. Hence, change, decay, death, rebirth,—the law of the world. All this takes place in the descent into the world of mind and the world of matter. Therefore mankind has one original language based on certain eternal types of sound, developed by certain laws of rhythmic variation, perfectly harmonious and symmetrical in its structure and evolution. Then it suffers change, detrition, collapse. Innumerable languages, dialects, vernaculars are born. The guardians of the sacred language attempt always to bring back the early purity, but even they cannot do it; they reconstruct it from time to time, compromise with the new tendencies, preserve something of the skeleton, lose the flesh, blood, sinew, much of the force and spirit. This reconstructed language they call Sanskrit; all else Prakrit.

"The backbone of the skeleton is composed of the roots of the original language that survive; the rest is the various principles of word-formation."

Vedic Sanskrit represents a very early stratum in the development of language. "The word for the Vedic Rishis is still a living thing, a thing of power, creative, formative. It is not yet a conventional symbol for an idea, but itself the parent and former of ideas."

Thus the Rishi could, by the use of a single word, convey one thing to the profane mind and quite another to the initiate. The mystics were and normally are symbolists. In the Vedic texts words like cow, horse, wolf, etc. recur constantly. But what do they really mean? Of course, the Vedic hymns have both inner and outer interpretations. And the veil is elaborately woven by the Vedic mystics but vanishes like a dissolving mist before our eyes if we choose not to be blind.

The Rishis

The goal of the Rishis is Swar, the solar world of the divine Truth and Bliss. The Truth is spoken of in the Veda as a path leading to felicity, leading to immortality. The Rishis yearn to emerge from untruth to Truth, from darkness to Light, emerge from a state of death to a state of

immortality. Not a prolongation of life; by immortality they meant the transcendence of life and death. But the achievement of Truth is an arduous task. "In the Vedic idea of the revelation, there is no suggestion of the miraculous or the supernatural.... Knowledge itself was a travelling and a reaching, or a finding and a winning; the revelation came only at the end, the light was the prize of a final victory."

We mortals when we are content with our humanity—be it ever so high—then we are confused in our functions. All of us are familiar with the confusion of our intellect, to say nothing of the stumblings of our mental activity in its grapplings with the contacts of the outer world.

Well, a Rishi is never content with his humanity. Our forefathers, the Vedic Rishis, thoroughly explored the universe and the human state. The vicissitudes of the human soul, they discovered, represent a cosmic struggle. "On the world-stage and in the individual soul the same real drama with the same personages is enacted," to put it in Sri Aurobindo's words.

The Rishis, let us not forget, are seers as well as sages. Many secrets were revealed to these men of vision, many mysteries. In their meditation they

saw embodied forces : Helpers and Obstructors, Gods and Demons.

The will of the Rishi is to break human bounds and rise to a higher existence. Easier said than done! Because most of the world-forces not only obstruct the passage but try to pull back the traveller. It is the function of the Demon to keep man shrouded in ignorance. The thicker the veil, the darker man's consciousness where the Demon can stage its macabre dance; and keep forever in its thrall man's soul.

Unlike us, our forefathers were made of heroic stuff. It was a necessity. For, the journey to the Truth is no easy march. The Rishi has to wage a fierce and relentless battle. He has "to labour and to fight and conquer, he must be a tireless toiler and traveller and a stern warrior, he must force open and storm and sack city after city, win kingdom after kingdom, overthrow and tread down ruthlessly enemy after enemy. His whole progress is a warring of Gods and Titans, Gods and Giants, Indra and the Python, Aryan and Dasyu." Old friends and helpers "turn into enemies, the kings of Aryan states he would conquer and overpass join themselves to the Dasyus [Demons] and are leagued against him in supreme battle to prevent his free and utter passing on."

The Shining Helpers and Obstructors

To the Vedic seers, Gods are not simply poetical personifications of abstract ideas or of psychological and physical functions of Nature, Sri Aurobindo explained. Gods are living realities to those mystics. The Vedic deities are "names, powers, personalities of the universal Godhead and they represent each some essential puissance of the Divine Being.... Children of Light, Sons of the Infinite, they call man to a divine companionship and alliance; they attract and uplift him to their luminous fraternity, invite his aid and offer theirs against the Sons of Darkness and Division." Man responds. In their upward march, he is a close ally of the Gods from level to level of the great hill of being. This is the birth and ascent of Agni. "Agni, the Immortal in mortals."

But the human soul is a battlefield full of helpers and hurters, friends and enemies. "The soul of man is a world full of beings, a kingdom in which armies clash to help or hinder a supreme conquest, a house where the gods are our guests and which demons strive to possess...."

A choice is always given to each of us born upon

the earth. Either place God in our house, become the brother and ally of the Shining Ones; or wallow in the mud like buffaloes, rub elbows with the personalities of our ignorance, evil, weakness, limitation, "who make constant war upon man, encircle him from near to shoot their arrows at him from afar or dwell in his gated house and with their shapeless stammering mouths mar his self-expression." Are we to remain enchained in their nether darkness? Surely, surely, man's ultimate goal cannot be a nether darkness? Surely, surely our goal is the vastness, the true existence, the light, the felicity—and ultimately immortality.

The aim of the creature born into matter, the soul that works imprisoned in the darkness of Matter, is to climb, led by the flaming strength of the divine Will, "from plateau to plateau as of a mountain, it has to cross as in the ship the waters of existence, traverse its rivers, overcome their deep pits and rapid currents; its aim is to arrive at the far-off ocean of light and infinity."

Who first brings us word of the great waters? Saraswati, the truth-audition, the Divine Word.

Shall we set out on the great adventure? Or just sit, afraid of the Obstructors? Mind you, many are the Sons of Darkness. They are the dividers,

plunderers, harmful powers. "There are Eaters and Devourers, Wolves and Tearers; there are hurters and haters; there are dualisers; there are confiners or censurers."

Among the Sons of Darkness is Vritra the Python, the grand Adversary, "for he obstructs with his coils of darkness all possibility of divine existence and divine action." Vritra the Besieger prevents the sevenfold Waters of Truth from flowing down upon the earth-consciousness in which we mortals live. These streams of Truth do not flow upon earth, but in heaven. The Serpent coiled itself across the fountains of the seven rivers and sealed up their outflow. Then came Indra of the richly-various lustres; "he comes impelled by the thought, driven forward by the illumined thinker within; he comes with the speed and force of the illumined-mind power, in possession of his brilliant horses."* Indra, the God-mind, smites the Dragon of the Fountain with his flashing lightnings. Indra's thunderbolt, made from the bones

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* *Ashwa*: Force, especially symbolic of life-energy and nervous force. The Vedic Rishis always insist on two requisites, Light and Power, the Light (cow) of the Truth working in the knowledge, the Power (horse) of the Truth working in the effective and enlightened Will.

of Rishi Dadhichi, slays Vritra. At the same time a passage is cloven out on the mountain and all the seven rivers are released together and sent flowing down upon the earth. Thus the King of the Gods cuts out a passage on the summit of the earth-consciousness down which the waters of the Truth and the Bliss can flow. From the supreme ocean flow the sevenfold Waters and pour out on our life the honeyed wave. The seekers of Bliss and Immortality can now drink the Soma-wine from the uncovered well of honey, for they are now able to see Swar, the Sun-World.

But hidden in the waters, released by Indra from the hold of Vritra, the gods find visible the divine Power, Agni. Agni, the child of the earth's growths, called the child of the earth and heaven, with his companion gods and the sevenfold Waters, enters into the superconscient. "In that entire meeting of these great ones Agni moves in all things; the rays of his vision are perfectly straight, no longer affected by the lower crookedness." There, in the unobstructed Vast where Truth is born, the shoreless infinite, Agni's own natural seat in which he now takes up his home, there he finds the source of the honeyed plenty of the Father of things and pours them out on our life.

Agni, the builder of form, is the son of Heaven by the body of the Earth.

The Release of Agni

We all, without exception, harbour an Augean stable in us. Want to rise to a higher existence? Begin by purifying that stable. A heroic task, let me warn you. But our first job is to find a Hercules who will turn the river Alpheus through the filthy stables to cleanse them. Besides, where to get, how to get at the river?

But wait, wait! Things are not as one-sided as all that. The creators of the order of the world also set a great thing within us: the flame of conscient Will. The Rishis named it Agni. This conscious and forceful Will is the immortal guest in our mortality, the mediator between earth and heaven. This Agni is our Hercules par excellence.

But there is a snag. Agni is hidden deep in the secrecy of our dark cavern. We have to discover him. He sleeps there. We have to awake him. We have to make him our friend. Because with him for friend we cannot come to harm. Agni is the great purifier. The very nature of purity is a clear

brightness and rightness. Our Path stretches clear and straight before us. The purpose of the waking is for divine action in man. Agni is the Priest of the Call. Awakened, the divine power acts, revealed, in the consciousness of the creature born into matter, the soul that works imprisoned in the darkness of Matter. "The flames of the divine activity in us are pointing upwards towards heaven, mounting up from the lower level of our being to the heights of the pure mind, and their rising is like the wide gushing up into manifestation of waters that have been hidden. For it is a great god that has been released out of the darkness.... With the morning of the revelation all divine faculties in us arise out of the night in which they have slept.... It is the secret waters in us that, released, gush up openly and widely from their prison and their secrecy in our mortal nature...." Great indeed is Agni when released out of the darkness of Ignorance, "out of this our blind bodily matter, out of this our smoke-enveloped vital energy, out of this our confused luminous murk of mortal mind and sense-enslaved intelligence."

The Flame is awakened; its presence is the beginning of the movement to the Truth and Immortality. Agni leads and he is the head too

of the march. "Fire at his birth," says the Rishi, "has shone out slaying the destroyers, darkness by light, he found the Ray-Cows, the Waters, the Sun-World." There, in the continent of the Riches, is the "Fire, the Mighty One, seated in the light, full of bliss, the holder of the Treasure." In the Sun-World is found the heavenly Treasure we have lusted after.

The Flame that arose from the secret abysses of the heart, "chants a divine hymn of luminous realisation and puissant fulfilment." Agni has led us to the continent of the shining gold of Truth.

Agni, making his home in the Sun-World, is resplendent in his glory. "He is life hard to violate," says the Rishi.

"The whole Rig-veda," Sri Aurobindo said, "is a triumph-chant of the powers of Light, and their ascent by the force and vision of the Truth to its possession in the source and seat where it is free from the attack of the falsehood."

The Rishis speak not only of an 'ascent' but also of a descent.

With the gold of Truth the Rishis can now weave bodies that reject evil.

The Sun Hidden in Matter

The symbols and parables of the Veda are connected. But says Sri Aurobindo, "the conception of the Dawn and the legend of the Angirasas [the human fathers] are at the very heart of the Vedic cult and may almost be considered as the key to the secret of the significance of Veda." That is the legend of the lost Sun and the lost cows and their recovery by our human Fathers.*

The cows are the herds of the Sun. The lost cows are the lost rays of the Sun, their recovery is the forerunner of the recovery of the lost Sun.

Usha, the Dawn, was disconsolate. Where were her children, the cows, the shining herds of the Sun? And where was the Sun himself? When she went to take the cattle out to pasture, there was no trace of any of them. The steeds were gone too! Usha, the daughter of Heaven, the Mother of radiance, heaven-gold her hue, the sweet-spoken Usha, is beloved of all. The whole clan of gods

* This legend is an old one and widespread. We find it not only among the Vedic people, but among the Mayas of America where too the Sun concealed for many months in the darkness is recovered by the hymns and prayers of the wise men.

rallied round her in her moment of distress. Sarama, the Intuition, the Hound of Heaven was there. So was Agni, the Seer-Will. Indra, dark as the rain-clouds, came armed with his thunderbolt; the Maruts, his forty-nine brothers, came rushing and closed ranks with him; Vayu, their eldest, is the Master of the Life-Energies. The Ashwins, the Riders of the Steed, were not late in coming; the twins are physicians, they bring back youth to the old, health to the sick, wholeness to the maimed. They are swift-footed Lords of bliss. Soma, the God of Bliss, could not be left behind. What would anyone do without the wine of his ecstasy! Indra's assistants, the three Ribhus, were making sure that all was in working order; those artisans of Indra shape his horses, the chariot of the Ashwins, the weapons of the Gods—all the means of the journey and the battle. Many were Usha's kingods, and now they came in battle array to combat the creatures of darkness. But the gods were still not sure of being able to vanquish unaided the untold number of their foes. So they called upon their allies, the Rishis; the seven Angirasa Rishis, our human Fathers who were the first founders of knowledge.

Thus assembled the hosts of heaven set out. They knew, of course, who the cow-stealers were: the

Dasyus. But the road to their country was beset with peril. For this home of the Dasyus, which they themselves describe as the world of falsehood beyond the bound of things, is the stronghold of the Panis, the lair of Vala, the Titan. Who among the godkind is capable of guiding the others to the secret places of the confiners? Sarama. For she is the Intuition who "leads in the search for the radiant herds." On the way she meets the Night which gives place to her for fear of her overleaping it. The Night is Usha's elder sister, she is "a darkness carrying morning in its breast." The gods follow their guide. The steeds too had been stolen. So Agni now takes the form of the milky-white Dadhikravan, the divine war-horse. Agni at the forefront, close to the guide, "Agni leading, Indra following, the other gods succeeding." Usha would not be left behind, she is with her brothers, her vision of all-round seeing restored by now. The Angirasa Rishis, led by their eldest Brihaspati, are very much the companions-in-arms of the gods. And with them all is Soma, to keep up their spirits.

The advance resumes under the cover of darkness. All night, stumbling and groping through wide defiles and rugged valleys, they follow the

guidance of Sarama. Sarama, the fair-footed, who speeds in front of all towards the voice of the vanished herds of Light. The hosts of heaven find themselves in a black ravine with bare crags rising sheer all round them. Sarama has led the gods to the place where the hill, so firmly formed and impervious in appearance, is broken and can admit the seekers. When what she seeks is found, Sarama only gives the message to the seers and their divine helpers. Her task is completed with the finding of the home of the robbers. Now it is up to the Allies to rescue the lost kine. They must wrest possession of the wealth that rightly belongs to them, "the much wealth hidden within in the rock behind the fortress gates of the Panis."

A fierce battle ensues. The Angirasas and their divine comrades fall on the enemy with their full battle-cry. Brihaspati, the Master of the Creative Word, the chief of the Angirasas, "with his cry broke the hills," the stronghold of the Panis, the stealers, who had hidden the cows of Usha in the dark cavern-pens. The Panis who make the knot of the crookedness; who have not the will to works, spoilers of speech—"Thou hast crushed with thy stroke the mouthless Dividers who mar our self-expression, thou hast cloven them asunder

in the gated city." Misers that they are, they make no use of the coveted wealth, "preferring to slumber." Their fortress breached, their slumber broken, the impious hosts rush behind their chief Vala, the Titan, who comes out raging from his hole in the mountain. Brihaspati breaks Vala into pieces with his triumphant cry. Agni burns. Indra smashes up the strong places of the hill. Many thousand companies of the robbers of the Deep are crushed in their inaccessible dwelling. The Ashwins open the doors of the strong pens that hold the kine. The Rishis and the Gods enter the cave-pen of the Panis and drive upward the liberated herds of Usha. Under the alert eyes of the Ashwins the shining cows are driven back to their own wide field: the great, manifold and blissful Field, Swar.

Our human Fathers, the Angirasa Rishis, pursue farther the enemy. They come to the darkest cave yet. The darkness within was engulfed in the darkness. They enter the cave on their hands and knees. And in that heart of darkness they discover Martanda, who had been concealed there by the Titans. The eighth son of Aditi—the all-creating infinite Mother—was seated there immense and alone. He is the black or dark, the lost, the hidden sun. The Sun hidden in Matter.

> The treasure was found of a supernal Day.
> In the deep subconscient glowed her jewel-lamp;
> Lifted, it showed the riches of the Cave
> Where, by the miser traffickers of sense
> Unused, guarded beneath Night's dragon paws,
> In folds of velvet darkness draped they sleep
> Whose priceless value could have saved the world.
>
> *Savitri*, I, III, 41-42

The Vedic Rishis, Sri Aurobindo said, "may not have yoked the lightning to their chariots, nor weighed sun and star, nor materialised all the destructive forces in Nature to aid them in massacre and domination, but they had measured and fathomed all the heavens and earths within us, they had cast their plummet into the Inconscient and the subconscient and the superconscient; they had read the riddle of death and found the secret of immortality...."

The spirit of these great Ancestors still assist their offspring; for the new dawns repeat the old and lean forward in light to join the dawns of the future.

"The seven sages, the Angirasas, are waiting still and always, ready to chant the word, to rend

the cavern, to find the lost herds, to recover the hidden Sun."

The hymns of the Veda are the triumph songs of the soul's battle in Matter, and its victory—and finally the transformation of this very Matter and of our body itself by the soul-power immured in our very cells.

SUJATA NAHAR was born in Calcutta in 1925 and spent her formative years at Santiniketan. At the age of twelve, following her father, she decided to stay near Sri Aurobindo and Mother at Pondicherry, where she lived for forty years. She first worked with Pavitra, a French mathematician and engineer who was Mother's right-hand man. Then in 1954, arrived Satprem, a young French adventurer and writer in search of man's reality; Mother soon made him the confidant of her experiences and entrusted to Sujata the typing of these private conversations, at which Sujata was present and which went on for almost twenty years—the *Agenda*. After 1973, when Mother left her body, the Ashram changed into a stereotyped institution. In 1978, Satprem and Sujata left Pondicherry to devote themselves exclusively to Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's work of hastening the evolution beyond man: "Man is a transitional being," said Sri Aurobindo.

MICHEL DANINO was born in 1956 at Honfleur, in France. From the age of 16 he was drawn to India and to Sri Aurobindo and Mother, and in 1977 cut short higher scientific studies to leave for South India, where he has since been living. Has participated in the English translation and publication of *Mother's Agenda* (13 volumes) and several other works. His fields of activity include nature conservation; for many years he has also been studying Indian culture and India's ancient history in the light of both Sri Aurobindo's pioneering discoveries and recent research.

SINCE the nineteenth century, India's ancient history from Vedic times and the true content of the Veda have both been distorted by a blinkered and unsympathetic scholarship. British rulers, European scholars and missionaries combined in a campaign to disparage the roots of Indian civilization, and used the wholly groundless Aryan Invasion theory to sow seeds of division in the Indian society — "divide and rule," but also "divide and convert." The same fallacies continue to be promoted today.

The first part in this book examines the birth of the Aryan myth, and the misuses it has bred; it then gives a fresh look at the invasion theory in the light of recent scientific evidence, and shows how it now stands overwhelmingly disproved. The second part offers the essence of the Veda's true message in the light of Sri Aurobindo's rediscovery of the Rishis' experience recorded in their pregnant hymns.

The result is a new perspective, in which India's bygone civilization and its fountainhead come alive, rejuvenated. We can now understand why, in Sri Aurobindo's words, "the recovery of the perfect truth of the Veda is a practical necessity for the future of the human race."

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